

SUMMER 2007

TANGENTS

THE JOURNAL OF THE
MASTER OF LIBERAL ARTS PROGRAM
AT STANFORD UNIVERSITY

IN WHICH

The WORDS are deduced from their ORIGIN

ILLUSTRATED

OF THE MOST SIGNIFICANT

EXAMPLES

OF THE BEST WRITERS



AND PREFIXED,

HISTORY of the LANGUAGE

IN THIS ISSUE...

Essays by Sarah Anderson, John Devine, Jerie Jacobs,
Lakshmikanthan Anandavalli, Ron Lewis,
Lindsay Marshall, and Xiao-Wei Wang

Poems by Tamara Tinker

AN ENGLISH GRAMMAR

BY SAMUEL JOHNSON, A.

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VOLUME 6

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PUBLISHING NOTES

This is a publication featuring the work of students and alumni of the Master of Liberal Arts Program at Stanford University.

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Cover: Boswell seeing Samuel Johnson's ghost, *The Works of Richard Owen Cambridge*, London 1803. Johnson at the table (p.26) from James Boswell's *Life of Johnson*, London 1791. Portrait of Johnson (p.29) from *A Dictionary of the English Language*, 10th edition, London 1810. All courtesy of John Mustain, Dept. of Special Collections, Stanford University Libraries.

LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

We are proud to present this issue of *Tangents*, the journal of the Stanford Master of Liberal Arts Program. For this sixth edition, we have chosen several studies from MLA 102, the MLA Program's initial core seminar, familiar to all of you as "The Plague." In articles that arose from that course, this issue will present these questions:

- ✦ How were the Chinese treated, and how did they respond during the 1900 plague in San Francisco?
- ✦ How do filmmakers use plague in their works?
- ✦ Why has history ignored the 1918 flu epidemic?
- ✦ What was Medieval India's real role in the advance of the Black Death into Europe?

Then, for a change of subject, we explore the following:

- ✦ How did Samuel Johnson's dictionary mirror his ideas of life and death?
- ✦ Are jazz musicians Emersonian poets?
- ✦ Seneca and Sophocles: How did 500 years change the story of *Oedipus*?

And for a change of pace, we offer two poems:

- ✦ Jonah Visits a Cathedral
- ✦ All the Roses

Be sure to read about this issue's contributors on the last page. We hope that our choices will give you hours of thoughtful reading—and that they will inspire future contributions to *Tangents*.

PLAGUE IN SAN FRANCISCO

AND THE CHINESE LEGAL RESPONSE



by Xiao-Wei Wang

In a city that prides itself on celebrating diversity and cultural inclusion, it is worth remembering that, only a century ago, San Francisco residents once described Chinese immigrants as “moral lepers” (McClain 453) who “successfully maintained and perpetuated the grossest habits of bestiality practiced by the human race” (Chase 11). Government officials at the city, state, and federal levels were also vocal about their anti-Chinese sentiments. John F. Miller, a California senator who promoted “an America that was resonant with the sweet voices of flaxen-haired children,” publicly referred to the Chinese as “a degraded and inferior race...the progenitors of an inferior sort of men” (Chang 130). These racist attitudes, along with anti-Chinese laws and city ordinances, were the social symptoms exacerbated by the bubonic plague that arrived in San Francisco’s Chinatown in 1900.

During the plague outbreak in San Francisco’s Chinatown (1900–1904), Chinese immigrant rights were violated in deplorable ways—most notably through city-mandated quarantines, forced inoculations, and the indefinite extension of the Chinese

Exclusion Act (enacted in 1882), a federal law that prohibited Chinese laborers from immigrating to the United States. The racial stigma of Chinatown’s plague infected American society and politics to such a hostile degree that it would be more than four decades before the Chinese Exclusion Act would be repealed in 1943. The scandalous anti-Chinese movement in San Francisco became infamous for its inhumane treatment of Chinese immigrants and legalized discrimination policies created to address the plague, a disease assumed to be spread by the Chinese. Despite the tremendous obstacles they faced, the Chinese were actually quite successful in using legal means to reverse many of the discriminatory city regulations and advocate for their civil rights, and they did so in a relatively short period of time after immigrating to the United States. The resilience of the Chinese and their eventual restoration of civil rights can be attributed to their perseverance, courage, and most significantly, to their prudent legal strategies for addressing harsh and unjust public health policies.

A large number of Chinese laborers, primarily from the southern province Guangdong, immigrated to California between 1850 and 1900. Lured by the

financial prospects of the San Francisco gold rush in 1849, and recruited to construct the transcontinental railroad, the fifty-person Chinese population in 1850 grew to 41,000 by 1860 (Zia 26). Early Chinese immigrants proved to be quite marketable; characterized by a strong work ethic, the Chinese (unlike their European immigrant peers) were willing to do menial labor for very low wages. When the United States began to slip into economic depression in the 1870s, however, unemployed white Americans accused the Chinese of stealing “American jobs,” and they began to resent and violently assault Chinese communities. One Chinese immigrant described his experiences in San Francisco in 1877: “When I first came, Chinese treated worse than dog. Oh, it was terrible...The hoodlums, roughnecks and young boys pull your

the Chinese. Shortly after the plague was discovered in Chinatown on March 6, 1900, the *San Francisco Chronicle* issued a statement by James Phelan, the mayor of San Francisco at the time. He described the Chinese as, “...fortunate, with the unclean habits of their coolies and their filthy hovels, to remain within the corporate limits of any American city. In an economic sense their presence has been, and is, a great injury to the working classes, and in a sanitary sense they are a constant menace to the public health” (Markel 65).

The San Francisco mayoral endorsement of intolerance for the Chinese legitimized the contempt of the general public for the Chinese. The plague’s arrival in San Francisco’s Chinatown only further aggravated the “Driving Out,” and provided a motive

THE HOODLUMS, ROUGHNECKS, AND YOUNG BOYS PULL YOUR QUEUE, SLAP YOUR FACE, THROW ALL KIND OF OLD VEGETABLES AND ROTTEN EGGS AT YOU.

queue, slap your face, throw all kind of old vegetables and rotten eggs at you” (Chang 126).

During this tense period, sometimes referred to as the “Driving Out” or the “Yellow Peril,” anti-Chinese publications surfaced, such as *Chinese Immigration and the Physiological Causes of the Decay of the Nation*, and demonstrators distributed propaganda with anti-Chinese slogans, “The coolie labor system leaves us no alternatives, starvation or disgrace,” and “Mark the man who would push us to the level of the Mongolian slave, we all vote” (Chang 122). The anti-Chinese hostility built up enough social and political tension that on May 6, 1882, Congress and President Chester Arthur passed the Chinese Exclusion Act, a law that barred the immigration of Chinese laborers for ten years. This was the first American law that exclusively discriminated against a specific ethnic group—it was a shameful moment in American history.

Unfortunately, the bubonic plague arrived in San Francisco during the “Driving Out,” when there was already intense animosity against the Chinese. In extreme contrast to the political correctness and cultural sensitivities in San Francisco today, there was absolutely no remorse or shame in expressing hatred or disgust of

for enforcing stricter regulations and expanding discriminatory practices already mandated by law. Beyond the health fears it stirred up, the plague initiated federally-supported, inhumane policies targeting Chinese immigrants. The most significant violations committed during the plague outbreak were legalized discrimination, confinement in poor living conditions, and compulsory inoculations.

The Chinese Exclusion Act was originally a temporary prohibition on Chinese immigration. However, in 1902, after the plague outbreak in Chinatown, it was extended indefinitely. Initially, the Act was designed to prevent additional Chinese laborers from entering the United States. But as fear and tension regarding Chinese communities worsened, the Act evolved, with the intent to slowly expel those Chinese residents already living in America. The regulations imposed on Chinese residents, some born in San Francisco, became deeply personal. As the majority of immigrants were men, the ratio of Chinese males to Chinese females was twenty to one. This gender imbalance made it nearly impossible for men to find companionship or to start families. At the time, the United States had also imposed anti-miscegenation laws. Thus, Chinese

men were essentially condemned to bachelorhood (a situation that subsequently contributed to widespread prostitution and brothels in Chinatown). The marriage restriction on Chinese immigrants was one of many personal abuses resulting from the Chinese Exclusion Act. Following multiple renewals and the extension of the Act indefinitely, new amendments and interpretations of the Act surfaced that further restricted Chinese rights. One interpretation denied the Chinese the right to American citizenship, even for those born on United States territory. The Chinese became the only immigrant group to be denied naturalization privileges.

The public health response to the San Francisco plague in 1900 is one of the most scandalous treatments of an epidemic in the history of public health. The

border was gerrymandered so that the white-owned business was not included in the quarantine-designated area (Markel 68). As the quarantine was imposed strictly on Chinese residents and businesses, it became obvious that, by enforcing “anti-plague” measures, the city actually meant “anti-Chinese.” Such were the racist practices legally enforced in San Francisco during the early twentieth century.

From officials at the city government level up through the President’s office, racial borders around Chinatown were enforced. On March 7, one day after the plague was discovered in Chinatown, a tall wooden fence was built around the district perimeter. Those Chinese who worked outside of Chinatown were not allowed to leave the district to attend their jobs, thus jeopardizing their employment and

A RING OF ARMED POLICE GUARDED THE QUARANTINE BORDER WHICH SURROUNDED TWELVE BLOCKS OF CHINATOWN

controversial treatment is primarily attributed to the infamous quarantine of Chinatown, which United States Surgeon General Walter Wyman ordered in a telegram: “Cordon [off] suspected area; guard ferries and R.R. stations with reference to Chinese only; house to house inspection with Haffkine inoculation; Chinatown to be restricted; ...suspects from plague houses to be moved if you deem necessary” (Chase 58). Howard Markel, author of *When Germs Travel*, describes the first day of the quarantine:

As they attempted to leave their neighborhood, the Chinese were shocked to find a battalion of armed policemen vigorously defending against all egress along their neighborhood’s boundaries...the mood in Chinatown was feverish. A team of health inspectors wearing surgical masks and rubber aprons descended and began a house-to-house search of the labyrinth of tenements and the neighborhood’s 35,000-plus residents. (Markel 64)

Night and day, a ring of armed policemen guarded the quarantine border that surrounded twelve square blocks of Chinatown. When a white-owned business was located within the border, however, the quarantine

livelihood. To further reinforce the border (and their anti-Chinese sentiments), the San Francisco Board of Health mandated the construction of a barbed wire fence around Chinatown, practically treating the Chinese as animals and trapping them inside with scarce resources (McClain 494). There was soon a critical shortage of food and supplies for the imprisoned Chinese residents. An anonymous poem reflects the hardships suffered by the Chinese in San Francisco:

American law, more ferocious than tigers
Many are the people jailed inside wooden walls
Detained, interrogated, tortured
Like birds plunged into an open trap
Had I only known such difficulty in passing the
Golden Gate
I regret my journey here. (Horn 48)

While a quarantine of Chinatown confined Chinese residents to a small physical area, there was still a need to prevent the plague from spreading through the city. Again, Surgeon General Wyman targeted the Chinese population; this time, he prescribed a mass inoculation of the city’s 25,000 Chinese residents and

mandated that no one would be permitted to travel outside Chinatown without a certificate verifying that a vaccine was administered. This announcement on May 17 naturally prompted an intense Chinese reaction; the Chinese newspaper *Chung Sai Yat Po* reported that the news of the mass inoculation “plunged the town into disorder” (McClain 471). The quarantine was already a severe violation of rights but, even worse, the vaccine proposed by Surgeon General Wyman was highly toxic and known to cause pain, swelling, redness of skin, and high fever (Markel 17). This prophylactic vaccine, referred to as Haffkine’s vaccine, had only been introduced in 1897 and was still considered to be an experimental drug. Chinatown residents refused to be degraded to the status of laboratory guinea pigs and subjected to compulsory

the scheduled mass inoculation, Chinese residents initiated the landmark case, *Wong Wai v. Williamson*, which questioned the constitutionality of Surgeon General Wyman’s prescription, and demonstrated the Chinese immigrants’ ability to utilize legal means as a defense against racially-driven health policies.

The majority of Chinese immigrants in San Francisco were laborers, and historic records indicate that there were few, if any, Chinese lawyers in the early 1900s; it may thus seem surprising that the Chinese possessed the litigation skills and resources to address anti-Chinese plague measures. We should therefore pause here to note that the Chinese actually made frequent courtroom appearances in the years leading up to the 1900 plague outbreak. In response to exclusion laws and the need to survive in a hostile



inoculation. They were outraged when they learned that the government had downplayed the dangers of the vaccine and had authorized the administration of an experimental drug.

On May 20, the scheduled date for the mass inoculation, very few Chinese appeared for their vaccinations. Little documentation exists as to why so few Chinese appeared, but Charles McClain, a law professor who specializes in Chinese discrimination cases, speculates that Chinese business leaders may have threatened those Chinese residents who submitted to the inoculation (474). As it turned out, beyond the principled boycott of the experimental vaccine, Chinatown’s business leaders advised the town wisely, for those Chinese who did receive the vaccination became very ill. As reported by the *Chung Sai Yat Po* press, one individual “almost immediately began to suffer pain... collapsed and seemed about to expire until a doctor was able to revive him” (McClain 475). The Haffkine prescription proved to be a failure for public health officers, and this failure was accentuated after the Chinese sought legal assistance and protection against future healthcare violations established in the guise of “anti-plague measures.” On May 24, four days after

anti-Asian society, the Chinese displayed great courage and perseverance during the “Driving Out.” Following the 1882 passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act (and its renewals), the Chinese were determined to dispute any further injustices; they filed multiple petitions and often challenged federal court decisions that wrongfully denied their family members the legal right to immigration. Between 1891 and 1905, the Chinese filed 2,657 habeas corpus petitions; this was a group that was evidently not shy about fighting for their rights. By the time the plague arrived in 1900, the Chinese had gained valuable experience in federal district and circuit courts (Salzer 93). Given this background, we can better understand how the Chinese were legally prepared to confront discriminatory plague policies in the 1900 cases, *Wong Wai v. Williamson* and *Jew Ho v. Williamson*.

On May 24, 1900, Chinese businessman Wong Wai filed a class-action lawsuit against the San Francisco Board of Health for the unlawful confinement of 25,000 Chinese residents, unless they submitted to an experimental (and dangerous) vaccine. The lawsuit, on behalf of all Chinatown residents, was organized and led by the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent

Association (CCBA), an organization funded by Chinese business leaders who established the group to provide legal advice to Chinese immigrants. The CCBA had been credited with the success of many court cases involving Chinese immigrant rights during the “Driving Out.” In the case of *Wong Wai v. Williamson*, the CCBA was able to bring in a powerful team of attorneys and political figures to convince circuit judge William Morrow that the forced inoculation was “boldly directed against the Asiatic or Mongolian race as a class, without regard to the previous condition, habits, exposure to disease, or residence of the individual” (Shah 139). The attorneys representing Wong Wai had a reputation for presenting robust oral arguments, and they were able to prove to Judge Morrow that the forced inoculation was an unconstitutional invasion of civil rights. *Wong Wai v. Williamson* became a landmark case in the reversal of a racially-driven public health policy and a turning point for Chinese immigrant civil liberties.

While the arguments and evidence were powerful and convincing, it was actually the legal representation that gave Wong Wai the strongest advantage in *Wong Wai v. Williamson*. Wong Wai was an eloquent man and well-informed regarding the law, but his connections to the best legal talent proved to be most influential to his success in court. During the “Driving Out,” the defense of Chinese immigrant rights had become a new specialty in the legal field, and given the competitive fees the Chinese were willing to pay, it became known as a profitable specialty. Many district attorneys who completed their terms in federal court (in which they were assigned to enforce Chinese exclusion laws) were known to transfer to the private sector, where the CCBA recruited them to work with Chinese immigrants. The CCBA was thus well-positioned for litigation, given that their lawyers had deep, inside knowledge about the anti-Chinese movement. Recruiting the lawyers who once represented their opposition was possibly the most prudent legal strategy of the CCBA (Salyer 100).

Wong Wai v. Williamson, in particular, demonstrated the ability of the Chinese to recognize and enlist the most competent and influential political figures in their defense. In addition to prominent members of the Chinese community, the legal team representing Wong Wai included James Maguire, a former judge and Congressional representative; John E. Bennett, a lawyer representing the Chinese consulate; and Samuel Shortridge, a distinguished local counsel (who would later be elected to the United States Senate).

After observing this team of attorneys working with Wong Wai, a reporter commented: “The Chinese are represented by an array of legal talent seldom, if ever before, seen in the local courts” (McClain 477). Judge Morrow was persuaded by this influential high-profile team of attorneys to cancel the vaccinations, and more importantly, to set a legal precedence that would deny the government the right to enforce compulsory inoculations using experimental drugs.

After the mass Haffkine vaccinations were reversed, quarantine measures were further tightened around Chinatown’s borders. Infuriated by the continuation of confinement, and further outraged that the quarantine border excluded white-owned residences and businesses, a Chinese grocer whose business was on Chinatown’s Stockton Street, filed a bill of complaint on behalf of Chinatown’s Chinese residents. Jew Ho’s now famous complaint stated that the quarantine was enforced selectively upon the Chinese, and that specifically, on Stockton Street, “every other address occupied by a Caucasian residence or business...showed a perfectly saw-toothed pattern of enforcement...every Caucasian address free of restrictions, every Chinese address subjected to them” (McClain 496).

On June 13, 1900, *Jew Ho v. Williamson* was brought to Judge Morrow’s court, where Jew Ho and his attorneys attacked the discriminatory nature of the quarantine border. The same powerful attorneys in the Wong Wai case represented Jew Ho, and they established a clever strategy. They presented the extreme notion that there was, in fact, no plague epidemic in Chinatown, and even if plague did exist, the gerrymandered quarantine perimeter was not drawn based on sound science, but was racially driven. During a three-day trial, Jew Ho and his attorneys presented 18 affidavits from San Francisco physicians and medical experts who, under sworn testimony, stated that there was no plague epidemic in the city (Chase 70). The attorneys representing Jew Ho built a strong case to convince Judge Morrow of their plea. To conclude their arguments, they presented their most powerful piece of evidence; on June 14, they released a statement from Henry T. Gage, Governor of California at the time, confirming that there was no plague epidemic in San Francisco, and that he was “eager to quash the rumor...of the existence of the dreadful plague in the great and healthful city of San Francisco” (McClain 500). Critics argued that the plague itself was not really a concern of Governor Gage’s; moreover, he simply wanted to protect the economic interests of California (and not have California

businesses shunned around the world). Jew Ho and his attorneys were well aware of Governor Gage’s no-plague manifesto, and they took full advantage of this knowledge to convince Judge Morrow that there was no plague, and therefore, no need for quarantine, particularly one established with racial boundaries. On June 15, yet another landmark decision surrounding plague policy was reversed as a result of Chinese legal perseverance; Judge Morrow lifted the Chinatown quarantine and stated, “The quarantine cannot be continued by reason of the fact that it is unreasonable, unjust, and oppressive...discriminating in its character [and] contrary to the provisions of the Fourteenth Amendment of the Constitution of the United States” (Chase 71). It was another victory for Chinese litigation, and it was a celebration of freedom and rights reinstated to the Chinese residents of San Francisco.

During the plague outbreak in San Francisco (1900–1904), 121 cases of plague were reported, 113 of which were fatal. Medical experts did eventually confirm that the plague bacteria existed in San Francisco, but the treatment that finally eradicated plague in San Francisco was neither confinement nor prescriptive vaccinations, and certainly not racially prompted. Rather, the “plague cure” was a city-wide ordinance to rat-proof all buildings. Though we now know that plague is typically transmitted through fleas on rats, in 1904 this was a breakthrough for science and public health. Given this new knowledge, the San Francisco Board of Health established a team of rat-trappers and ordered the fumigation and cleansing of all areas where the plague was found (Shah 150). The anti-rat campaign throughout San Francisco proved to be effective, and on February 29, 1904, the 1900 outbreak of San Francisco plague recorded its last victim.

Given that the number of plague cases began to rapidly diminish following the administration of rat-proofing measures, we now know that the quarantine and anti-Chinese policies were ineffective practices to combat plague in 1900. It is tragic that the Chinese suffered economically and socially. However the unity, courage and legal experience they gained helped strengthen them as individuals and as a community. The plague, while it brought on unforgivable discriminatory practices, prompted the Chinese to strategize with their neighbors and business colleagues, and increase their understanding of American systems. Though they were relatively new to American culture, the Chinese advanced quickly in their comprehension of legal procedures and their ability to navigate through governmental organizations.

The Chinese, once described as “moral lepers” and wrongfully targeted as medical scapegoats, survived the 1900 plague in San Francisco and made great progress in shaping public health policies and raising the awareness of immigrant rights. Their legal success can be attributed to the attorneys who represented them, and to the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association, which continues to operate and provides legal services to Chinese immigrants and Chinese-American citizens. To their benefit in the short and long-term, Chinese residents of San Francisco in 1900 were resourceful and wise to participate in the American legal system. Their legal response and actions resulted in the important understanding that the plague was not a Chinese disease, and even more significantly, that Chinese-Americans would not tolerate the unlawful denial of their civil rights.

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NOSFERATU

THE PLAGUE BEARER



AN ANALYSIS OF THE TREATMENT OF PLAGUE IN CINEMA

by Lindsay Marshall

It is widely considered to be the best unproduced screenplay ever written. With the kind of talent studio executives dream of, however, why was *Harrow Alley* never purchased by a major studio? The 1960s was not a decade that shrank from unpleasant cinematic experience, so the fact that *Harrow Alley* is about the Great Plague of London seems an unlikely reason for the snub. However, upon further study, it seems that plague is the only plausible reason why such a well-written script, with no unusual technical problems, would fail to make the transition from paper to celluloid. *Harrow Alley's* failure as a film seems to imply a deep reluctance to confront plague on screen, a reluctance that extends beyond mere squeamishness. Plague in film serves a revelatory function that exposes the human condition in all its rawness in a way that still frightens modern audiences. It gives a vision of humanity that we are unwilling to examine.

Plague has always held fascination for students of the past. Even eyewitnesses to the fourteenth century tragedy seem almost transfixed by the events they report. Humanity's transformation during plague easily becomes the central theme for many writings, both fictional and historical, and continues uninterrupted in cinema. In fact, very little attention has been paid to plague itself, and every appearance it makes in film serves the secondary purpose of revealing human character to the audience. Films tend to treat plague in one of three ways. It most often serves as a backdrop for other issues, such as Swedish existentialism in Bergman's *The Seventh Seal* or time travel in the New Zealand prodigy *The Navigator*. Sometimes it becomes comedic fodder, as in *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*, and it most popularly appears in horror films, especially those of the zombie variety. The power of plague in cinema is such that it inspires recoil or ridicule.

In the hands of a master filmmaker, however, plague can become a mighty revelation, serving, as Cyprian noted of the Plague of Carthage in *Mortality*, as a judge who "... searches out the justice of each and every one and examines the minds of the human race; whether the well care for the sick, whether relatives dutifully love their kinsmen..." (Cyprian 212). Plague becomes a mirror filmmakers hold up to society, using the well-known tragedy and the horror it inspires, even in a modern audience, to force the viewer to see a true reflection. It is not the noble, stoic face most films present. Plague films cannot gloss over the details of plague history and hope to retain an audience. Instead, the mirror shows what might otherwise be called distortion, in which those who appear good are wicked and those who seek to be good suffer immensely for it. It is no pleasant sight, but within it lies the hope of a true vision of humanity.

Two excellent examples of this plague mirror are films of the same story told in different decades. In 1922, F.W. Murnau presented his masterpiece of German expressionism, *Nosferatu: eine Symphonie des Grauens*. Werner Herzog's homage, *Nosferatu the Vampyre*, was released in 1979. Both films take as their subject matter Bram Stoker's nineteenth-century popular novel *Dracula*. Both films also make drastic alterations to the source material, from setting and character to the central theme of the work. Most important, both filmmakers give the legendary vampire a weapon not included in Stoker's arsenal—plague. Studied together, both *Nosferatus* reveal vehement statements of the human condition in the face of great tragedy.

F. W. Murnau was a foundational member of the German expressionist movement in cinema. At a time when the medium was uncharted artistic territory, Murnau joined legions of artists in an exploration of its potential. These pioneers believed that film could serve as an emancipator of the lower classes (and all others under the thrall of bourgeois linguistic communication), and that it would serve that purpose through seeming contradiction. By presenting jarring images, which aesthetic philosopher Walter Benjamin termed a 'shock' to the viewer, film forces the viewer into a disoriented state called *distraction*; only in the experience of self found in this 'shock' can the viewer gain rationality. This makes the 'real' visible, and because this revelation is based on experience through the primal form of images, it frees the viewer from having to seek an interpreter, and involves the viewer in the creation of that art. Benjamin saw film as an opportunity to take a popular form of entertainment and use it to jolt the audience out of their tendency to swallow prevailing ideologies without any cognitive response.

In Murnau's films, *Nosferatu* especially, the cinematic shock is central to the narrative. For an audience familiar with the popular story, the first jolt comes with the name of the title character. *Nosferatu* may seem to be a simple substitute for Stoker's *Dracula*, but the name itself speaks of the differences between the two. While *Dracula* may derive from Latin for 'dragon' or Romanian for 'devil', *Nosferatu* has a Greek origin, *nosophoros*, or 'plague bearer.' Immediately, the story shifts from a supernatural version of Jack the Ripper to a tale of far more inhuman evil. Even the character's bestial associations shift from Stoker's bats to Murnau's rats. Count Orlock's rodent-like appearance and entourage of plague-infested rats radically change the tone, telling the viewer that though it has the trappings of Stoker's novel, this is, indeed, a new story. It's no wonder that Florence Stoker sued Murnau for butchering her husband's novel and infringing on its copyright.

Fully aware of the copyright infringement, Murnau saw the brilliance of the changes to *Dracula* and was determined to film Henrik Galeen's revolutionary screenplay. Though it carries undertones of the spiritual allegory of Stoker's novel, *Nosferatu* presents a dialectical struggle of evil and love worthy of Benjamin's 'shock.' Unlike Stoker's novel, Nina and Orlock become the central characters for Murnau's film, and the film's arc centers on the conflict between Orlock's evil, visually represented by plague, and Nina's love for Jonathan Van Helsing, an active character of *Dracula* who manages to defeat the vampire, is relegated to the impotent role of observer in *Nosferatu*. His great accomplishment in the film is providing an illustrated lecture about a Venus flytrap that Murnau intercuts with Orlock's predatory movement through the city at night. Science, as represented by Van Helsing, can only observe the occurrence of evil, and offers no hope of defeating it. Such a view hardly comes as a surprise in a film released a mere three years after the Great Influenza Epidemic and the War to End All Wars, both incidents in which science proved either helpless against, or worse, a catalyst for the destruction of the human race.

For Murnau, redemption comes through Nina. Upon reading that a pure woman must willingly offer her blood to the vampire, distracting him until the sun comes up, Nina is convinced that she alone can stop the force of evil that marches against her beloved husband and home. She does so, and the plague bearer falls into her trap. Once the sun rises, Orlock realizes his mistake but cannot escape the first rays of the sun. In what must

have shocked a contemporary audience, the vampire disappears in a puff of smoke, destroyed by love. Nina has just enough strength left to call for Jonathan; when he enters she dies, a sacrifice for the town. The scene evokes what must have been many scenes of anguish as influenza victims called for family from their deathbeds. Murnau seems almost to soothe his audience with the thought that though science is ineffective, love is triumphant in the face of tragedy.

THE VAMPIRE DISAPPEARS IN A PUFF OF SMOKE, DESTROYED BY LOVE

In his homage to Murnau's masterpiece, Werner Herzog takes the story in a far more severe direction. A founding member of the New German Cinema movement that followed World War II, though not by any means an activist like other filmmakers of his time, Herzog nevertheless felt the compulsion many of them did to respond on film to the evils done through the medium by his parents' generation. This motivation led the New German Cinema filmmakers to the same conclusion the Expressionists found under quite different circumstances. This time, however, traditional narrative was rejected because it had been used as propaganda and had, with the influence of Hollywood, been a vehicle of commercialism. New German Cinema also brought a return to the theory of distraction, this time fueled by the work of Walter Benjamin, a hero of later German artists for his resistance to Nazi control. As German filmmakers strove to redeem their beloved art form from the likes of Leni Reifenstahl, notorious director of the Nazi propaganda film *Triumph of the Will*, they latched onto the work of the Expressionists and pushed early German film theory to its limits. Herzog was no exception.

Though his style varies greatly from film to film and even his own explanations of his works are elusive at best, it is easy to trace the influence of Expressionist filmmaking in Herzog's work. When pressed in an interview, Herzog once said, "... as children growing up in post-war Germany we had grandfathers but no fathers to learn from... [t]he father generation had either sided with the barbaric Nazi culture or was chased out of the country" (Cronin 152). This left the generation of German filmmakers who followed without "masters to learn from and in whose footsteps we wanted to follow" (Cronin 152). In their place, Herzog remarks, they turned instead to their cinematic grandfathers, those filmmakers who, like Murnau, pioneered the medium before Hitler's rise to power. The most obvious reach toward this tradition in Herzog's work is, of course, his homage to Murnau's vampiric masterpiece in 1979's *Nosferatu the Vampyre*. Of the film, Herzog says, "For me, *Nosferatu* is the greatest of all German films, and feeling as strongly as I did, I needed to connect to this 'legitimate' German culture in order to find my roots as a filmmaker" (Cronin 152). And yet, even in his adaptation, Herzog uses the classic tale to make revolutionary statements about human character that are completely outside Murnau's worldview. Though Herzog declares that "my generation shared a similar attitude to Murnau and his contemporaries: cinema as legitimate culture" (Cronin 152), that sympathetic link did not constitute a re-visitation of 1920s German cinema. In many ways, Herzog's *Nosferatu* is not an homage, but a condemnation.

Herzog says, "I never thought of my film *Nosferatu* as being a remake. It stands on its own feet as an entirely new version" (Cronin 151), and Herzog's *Nosferatu* indeed opens by declaring itself a film of its own, bearing almost no resemblance to Murnau's film. The opening sequence is a slow pan of a row of mummified corpses, many with mouths open, as though the ominous choral music accompanying the shot came from the dead. Yet, even in this difference, Herzog draws upon Murnau's use of the natural world, rather than a constructed set, to set the mood. And in fact, Herzog says, "What I really sought to do was connect my *Nosferatu* with our true German cultural heritage, the silent films of the Weimar era and Murnau's work in particular" (Cronin 151). At once, Herzog declares his intention to honor his predecessor through imitation while reminding his audience that he is an individual filmmaker with a distinct voice. Though the rest of the film is at times a shot-for-shot retelling of Murnau's tale, Herzog warns the audience from the beginning that his conclusion will be quite different.

The first major departure from the 1922 *Nosferatu* is the role of plague. While Murnau depicts the plague with haunting images of processions of coffins throughout the town and scurrying rats, Herzog places far more emphasis on its role in the town's destruction. The city is entirely overrun, and rats literally spill down staircases and flood streets. In the town square, Herzog reproduces an eerie *danse macabre*. Resigned to their fate, the townspeople celebrate, dancing, laughing, and feasting while rats scurry underfoot. The sequence ends with a lonely shot of an abandoned table, still laid with the feast but without human occupants, and only rats swarming the surface. The audience develops a heightened emotional connection to the plight of the characters, forcing viewers to seek a savior from the pestilence.

The obvious choice for that savior would be the great scientist Dr. Van Helsing, but in this character Herzog again departs from Murnau's interpretation. In the original, Murnau relegated Van Helsing to mere observation; Herzog's Van Helsing is an active character who discusses the danger of Dracula's arrival with Lucy (Herzog's Nina) and discredits her spiritual insight. Keeping in mind Murnau's use of Van Helsing as symbolic of science, it is tempting to ascribe a more optimistic view of scientific advancement to Herzog. To succumb to that temptation, however, would be a foolish mistake. In the climax of the film, Herzog uses Van Helsing to expose science's ultimate impotence, and then turns to Lucy to demolish Murnau's thesis.

Lucy is far more active in Herzog's film than her counterpart was in Murnau's original. She is much more aware of the danger and more intent on finding the way to stop the vampire's assault on the town than Nina ever was. That may seem to be due to the dramatic styles of Murnau's time, but there is no shortage of proactive heroines in early cinema. Lucy's determination takes her past her own contempt for the power of religion to stop evil, and even has her crumbling sacramental wafers around her husband to shield him from the monster stalking the town. Then, in an almost shot-for-shot homage to Murnau's interpretation, Lucy calls to the plague-bearer, offering herself as a willing sacrifice to drive the pestilence from her home and save her beloved Jonathan.

Unlike Murnau's Nina, however, all Lucy's strivings are in vain. She succeeds in luring Dracula to her bed. Herzog plays on the audience's familiarity with the story, and we sigh with sad relief when the first rays hit the room, knowing our heroine has died, but with her death she has rid the world of the source of the plague. Dracula crumples to the floor, dead, but not destroyed. Finally convinced by Lucy's pleas, but too late to save her, Van Helsing suddenly appears on the scene, stake and axe in hand. Only guided by Lucy's actions can 'science' kill Dracula. Van Helsing does the deed and descends from the room, triumphant and ready to take charge of the disposal of the body to ensure the final defense against evil. It is then that Herzog unleashes his most biting criticism, the harshest look in the mirror.

VAN HELSING COMES DOWN FROM DEFEATING COUNT DRACULA, BLOODY AXE IN HAND

Jonathan lurks downstairs. Convincing the maid to sweep up the wafers surrounding him, he rises, his face already becoming a shadow of the rodent-like visage of the count, and with a word stops Van Helsing in his tracks. Rather than save her beloved Jonathan, Lucy has completed the transformation that was begun at the count's castle. Jonathan becomes the new plague-bearer. The great comfort Murnau brought with Nina's sacrifice becomes a source of terror in Herzog's Lucy.

Lucy's failed sacrifice is not the last tragedy of the day, nor is it the most dramatic departure Herzog takes from Murnau's film. As Jonathan begins to regain his presence of mind, realizing his new identity, Van Helsing comes down from defeating Count Dracula, bloody axe in hand. Immediately, Jonathan accuses the scientist of murdering the good count in cold blood and orders that he be carried away. Despite his bravery in slaying the monster, Van Helsing is helpless to resist his own arrest. Not only has the first plague-bearer rendered the city

impotent, but his successor has also managed to shackle science to the ruins of a devastated city with minimal effort. Herzog's condemnation of the power of science is a stinging rebuke to any who would put their trust in it, a declaration that even as science appears to have vanquished its foe, the remedy has only made the disease stronger. As Jonathan rises from his chair, no longer a victim of the sun's rays, it is difficult not to interpret this macabre resurrection in light of the medical community's tendency to overtreat diseases today, rendering their mutated descendent microbes more potent than before. Seen through this lens, Herzog's use of plague reveals to us our unwitting habit of being the cause of our own destruction.

In 1921 Murnau showed us the futility of trusting in science to shield us from human tragedy, but held out the hope that love could span the gap. In 1979, Herzog took a sledgehammer to that idea. In both films, plague becomes a device worthy of Benjamin. In an age of scientific optimism, Murnau exposes the discipline's inadequacies and instead points his audience toward a view of love that transcends the world as defined by science, capable of destroying the greatest evil. Decades later, in the wake of both Nazi Germany and Hollywood's overcommercialization of cinema, Herzog pushed Murnau's thesis further, creating a world in which science is nothing but sound and fury, and the sacrificial love meant to defeat evil in fact only makes it stronger. As Herzog himself said, "Film is not analysis, it is the agitation of the mind; cinema comes from the country fair and the circus, not from art and academicism" (Cronin 139). Herzog reveals a world in which the source of great evil is within us.

This view of humanity, seen through the mirror of plague, is merely one facet of cinema's examination of the human condition in light of this most powerful event. Bergman's *The Seventh Seal* uses plague to examine the futility of fleeing death. Tarkovsky's *Andrei Rublev* shows the capacity of humanity to emerge from the ashes of the plague village and create beauty. Murnau's *Nosferatu* reveals the futility of science and the transcendent power of love, and Herzog's *Nosferatu* exposes the danger that lurks within our own breasts to become the source of great evil. In light of these powerful examples, it seems that Weimar film theory remains the foundation of cinema, a unique medium in which visual images can offer the viewer a revolutionary experience, forcing the viewer into a state of distraction, and "[t]his distracted form of experience inevitably [leads] to an impoverished and 'abstract' encounter with the self and the world" (Aitken 17). Only in this encounter can we truly learn who we are, and the most effective means of distraction, the shock that presses audiences beyond their accepted ideology and has done so throughout film history, is the phenomenon of plague.

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In the ten months between September 1918 and June 1919, a deadly pandemic swept the world. The so-called "Spanish" influenza claimed an estimated 20 million to 50 million lives in that brief span (Aranson 103). In the United States alone, the death toll from flu and its complications reached 675,000, considerably more than the number of Americans killed in World War I, World War II, the Korean War, and the Vietnam wars combined (Crosby 206-207). By any measure, the influenza of 1918-1919 constituted a global crisis of epic proportions. It spread with alarming speed, struck the young and robust, and brought swift, miserable death to its victims. The virus "killed more humans than any other disease in a period of similar duration in the history of the world" (Kolata 7).

In spite of its dramatic impact on millions of lives—more than twenty-five percent of the U.S. population fell ill with the influenza (6)—the epidemic never captured the imagination or inspired wonder or interest in Americans as have other long-ago and far-distant plagues. This lack of historical attention to the Spanish flu led historian Alfred Crosby to dub it "America's Forgotten Pandemic." In the last chapter of his 1989 book, Crosby poses this question: "Why did Americans pay so little attention to the pandemic in 1918 and why have they so thoroughly forgotten it since?" (Crosby 319). In the past decade, a flurry of interest in and

scholarship about the 1918 flu pandemic has arisen in the face of new global health concerns. Today, the advent of SARS and various bird flus grips the world in fear of another massive viral epidemic. After eighty years of historical neglect, scholars and historians in the twenty-first century have studied the 1918 flu epidemic with new interest. Not only did public attention to the 1918 influenza epidemic quickly fade in its aftermath, Americans took scarce notice of the crisis at its height. A.J. McLaughlin, Assistant Surgeon General of the United States Public Health Service, complained in December of 1918, when the first wave of the epidemic had felled thousands of Americans, "It is remarkable to see the placidity by which the people have generally taken the almost sudden loss of 300,000 lives" (Crosby 322). A stunned national consciousness, the nature of influenza itself, the futility of belated public health and professional medical responses, and the overwhelming events of World War I combined to see the flu epidemic "essentially lost to public memory" (Blakely 8) for most of a century.

Crosby argues well his assertion that the American national memory buried the events of the 1918 influenza epidemic as quickly as families buried their dead. In *America's Forgotten Pandemic*, he details how determinedly Americans went on with their lives post-1918, and how little discussion of the pandemic took place in the public arena. Crosby cites the *Readers Guide to Periodical Literature* from 1919-1921 as having "13 inches of column space devoted to citations of articles about baseball, 20 inches to Bolshevism, 47 to Prohibition, and 8 inches to the flu" (Crosby 314). The epidemic fared no better in America's long-term memory. Crosby examines college U.S. History textbooks in wide use at the time of his book's first printing in 1989. Out of the seven books he reviews, "only one so much as mentions the pandemic . . . gives it one sentence and in that sentence understates the total number of deaths due to it by at least one-half" (315). The United States government and private agencies, such as life insurance companies, kept careful mortality and morbidity statistics (Crosby 210-213) during the influenza years. The American waves of the epidemic started among the U.S. military, which also kept detailed records of deaths and hospital activity among

by Jerie Jacobs

THE DAZED SILENCE THAT FOLLOWS:

CULTURAL MEMORY AND THE INFLUENZA EPIDEMIC OF 1918

its ranks (Byerly 98). The dry actuarial and statistical data were available during the height of this plague, and testified to the severity of the epidemic, but they produced little interest. Remarkably, no one recorded the *experience* of American women, men, children, and families with the deadly illness.

The notable exception is Katherine Anne Porter's book *Pale Horse, Pale Rider*. Porter contracted the Spanish flu in 1918 as a young adult, and barely survived. Her fever was so severe that her hair turned white and fell out. Porter spent unconscious weeks poised between life and death. She returned to consciousness to learn that her fiancé, who had cared for her in the early stages of the flu, had also taken ill and died of the influenza (Hendrick 76). It remained the great tragedy of her life. Almost twenty years after her struggle with flu, Porter wrote *Pale Horse, Pale Rider*, a fictionalized, but highly autobiographical account of her own nightmarish 1918 illness. Miranda, Porter's fictional alter ego in the book, emerges from the hospital following her near-fatal bout of influenza and after the official end of World War I. "No more war, no more plague, only the dazed silence that follows the ceasing of the heavy guns; noiseless houses with the shades drawn, empty streets, the dead cold light of tomorrow" (Porter 205). Miranda's post-influenza stupor and sense of detachment may explain, as well as anything, the lack of contemporary accounts of the 1918 plague in the United States. As Katherine Anne Porter herself remarked of her youthful flu experience in a 1963 interview, "It just simply divided my life, cut across it like that . . . I was really 'alienated,' in the pure sense . . . I really had participated in death, I knew what death was, and had almost experienced it" (Thompson 85). Americans were dazed, benumbed not only by the devastation of the flu, but by the horrific war that was its backdrop. From that paralyzed national consciousness few voices issued forth to tell individual human stories of the plague.

The nature of the disease itself contributed significantly to the public perception of and reaction to the 1918 epidemic. Influenza, in its milder forms, was a "familiar yearly visitor" to Americans in the early twentieth century (Bristow 58). Many families had traditional home remedies that they used during the

annual flu season—burning coal tar to destroy germs, wearing camphor or asafoetida necklaces, eating onions, making hot vinegar plasters for the chest of the sufferer (67). Even as reports of the spread of influenza overseas appeared in newspapers, Americans felt little alarm at the thought of this garden-variety illness. They had weathered the flu before, maybe lost an aged relative to the sickness, and would weather it again. In late 1918, the influenza virus surfaced in the United States in a virulent and deadly form, the "most lethal strain ever to stalk the globe" (Aronson 38). Though the virus would kill millions, its initial symptoms were very much like those of a typical flu—fever, headache, muscle aches, sore throat, and cough—nothing to breed panic in hardy American souls. The benign early symptoms of killer flu lulled people into a sense of the ordinary. Death struck quickly without drawn-out scenes of suffering. One Montana nurse working during the epidemic recorded in her diary, ". . . this is the most peculiar disease I have ever seen. Some persons hardly know they are sick until they are dying" (Steele 8).

The medical community and public health administrators staunchly stated their confidence that the flu did not pose a serious threat, which reinforced the public's complacency about the 1918 influenza season. Colonel J. M. Kennedy, of the United States Medical Corps, responded to a report that "Spanish" flu-infected passengers were debarking from ships docked in New York harbor with this statement in the August 18, 1918 *New York Times*: "Influenza, and the kind that is coming here is just like ours or that of any other country, is not at all dangerous" (Blakely 28). That same week the *New York Times* ran an unequivocal statement from Dr. Leland Cofer, the health officer for the port of New York, that included this ludicrous assurance: "There is not the slightest danger of an influenza epidemic breaking out in New York, and this port will not be quarantined against disease" (27). Similar denials of the dangers of influenza issued from municipal public health agencies across the United States. In Philadelphia, hundreds of sailors and civilians had been hospitalized with influenza before the Bureau of Health "finally made influenza a reportable disease" on September 21, 1918 (Crosby 71).

By October of that year, weekly death rates in the major Eastern cities climbed into the hundreds and then the thousands. With the mounting death toll, public statements from medical authorities changed in tone. Confidence and denial turned into acknowledgment and helplessness. Surgeon General Blue said, "There is no such thing as an effective quarantine in the case of pandemic influenza" (Blakely 30). Another prominent physician admitted, "You can't do anything for influenza" (Bristow 58). Debra Blakely asserts that media coverage in 1918 framed the flu in terms of the futility of public health measures and the ineffectiveness of medical intervention (Blakely). This created a sense that it was "the responsibility of the American public to act intelligently in order to not contract the disease" (30). While thousands died every day, the grim statistics prompted little outcry among the general population for more drastic public health measures. Most families simply dealt with the sickness in their own way. Many cities instituted strict laws intended to curb the spread of the virus. Public gatherings were discouraged. San Francisco passed a citywide ordinance to mandate the general wearing of "sanitary" masks in public places (Crosby 103). Public spitting resulted in stiff fines or arrests (Aronson 87). Philadelphia ordered all schools, churches, saloons, and theaters closed on October 3, 1918 (Crosby 74). Just over two weeks later, Philadelphia reeled from the highest weekly death rate of that deadly autumn—4,597 reported deaths from influenza (86). No wonder the general population greeted public flu-control mandates with ambivalence (Blakely 33). The influenza advanced in spite of rigorous public policies.

Another factor in the influenza epidemic's low profile in the public consciousness was the helplessness of medical professionals to head off or treat the disease. Doctors in the early decades of the twentieth century had enjoyed success with new scientific methods and germ theory and felt secure in their ability to meet any scourge (Bristow 60). Public confidence in medical science ran equally high. The editor of the *Daily Californian* voiced this optimism with certainty in October of 1918: "There seems to be no occasion for special alarm or panic about the matter, for the disease is one which the American medical profession is

perfectly able to handle" (60). As the influenza raged through communities large and small, people became disillusioned with the ability of medical science to prevail against it. Families caring for their sick increasingly sought the folk remedies of the past rather than "science" to address the influenza (Aronson 77). The flu spread rapidly, killed swiftly, and defied all known methods of cure. Doctors became exhausted and discouraged. Many looked upon the 1918 flu epidemic as the greatest failure of their professional lives. Dr. Benjamin Washburn recalled: "There wasn't much a doctor could do. The patient would be dead before he could get back to see him . . . I guess the coffin makers were the ones who were busy at that time" (Bristow 60). V.C. Vaughan, surgeon general of the Army during the pandemic, later wrote of the "Spanish" flu: "The saddest part of my life was when I witnessed hundreds of deaths . . . and did not know what to do. At that moment I decided never again to prate about the great achievements of medical science and to humbly admit our dense ignorance in this case" (62). The experiences of this "exercise in horror and humility" haunted doctors long after the influenza passed (63). Still, the corps of medical professionals, eyewitnesses to the devastation of the epidemic, remained silent. William Carlos Williams, early twentieth-century American author and poet, attended medical school at the University of Pennsylvania. He practiced medicine in New Jersey for fifty years, including the period of the influenza epidemic. Dr. Williams made up to sixty house calls a day at the height of the "Spanish" flu (Crosby 316). Though his poetry and novels draw from the "details of experience . . . of daily, commonplace living in the urban sections of the twentieth century U.S." (Benet 1093), the battle with influenza hardly appears in his literary work. The flu "was not a story that people of the Progressive Era and the Age of Modern Medicine wished to be reminded of . . . scientific medicine's inability to conquer the influenza epidemic may have spurred a national amnesia" (Byerly 184).

Perhaps the most obvious explanation for the lack of attention Americans paid to the influenza epidemic of 1918 lies in the overpowering events of World War I. The dramatic impact of this "war to end all wars"

MORE THAN TWENTY-FIVE

PERCENT OF THE U.S. FELL ILL WITH THE INFLUENZA

gripped the public imagination and commanded the attention of governments and the media. The influenza epidemic simply could not compete with the electrifying reports of history in the making during the war era. The civilized nations of the world had sent “60 million men to the field of battle, and had killed between 9 and 10 million soldiers, injured twice that number and killed at least 5 million civilians as well” (Byerly 183). The battles of World War I were waged with monstrous new technologies—submarines, trench warfare, chemical weapons—that resulted in previously unthinkable death tolls (Kolata 53). Monarchies toppled, empires collapsed. These truly momentous and appalling developments demanded notice. The United States officially entered World War I in April of 1917. President Woodrow Wilson galvanized his countrymen with his stated intention to make “the world safe for democracy” (Aronson 84). Idealistic Americans, already horrified by news reports of the grisly European conflict, rallied passionately to support the war effort. A sleeping giant had awakened, and Americans had a new sense of purpose and an important role on the world stage. With all eyes fixed on the trenches “Over There,” the silent killer here was hardly noticed.

In the months following Congress’ declaration of war, the United States armed forces undertook an unprecedented effort to recruit, train, and transport thousands of young American soldiers to the battlefields of Europe. Military outposts across the United States were filled far beyond their capacities with recruits in training. The first recorded case of the “Spanish” influenza on American soil checked into the military hospital at Fort Riley in Kansas on March 11, 1918. Private Albert Gitchell, a company cook, had what he believed was a bad cold—fever, sore throat, headache and body aches (Aronson 43). Though hundreds of soldiers at Fort Riley and other military camps all over America reported similar symptoms in the days and weeks that followed, army medical personnel treated the outbreak with little alarm and many soldiers returned to duty after a few days. That same March, 84,000 American troops embarked for Europe, with 118,000 following in April (Crosby 18). Among the soldiers packed into over-

crowded troop transport ships, the influenza virus thrived, spread, and became more virulent (Aronson 45). The newly arriving soldiers brought the virus ashore in France, and by mid-May American troops abroad were besieged by influenza. The conditions of warfare and the movement of troops sped the virus in its work of death. Back home in America, where the flu had not yet jumped into the civilian population, death statistics from the war in Europe began to appear in newspapers. Leonard Ayres, chief statistician for the War department during World War I, calculated the American casualties at 116,000. Of those deaths, only forty-three percent occurred in battle. Fifty percent, 57,460 deaths, were from disease—primarily influenza and its complications (Byerly 186). Somehow, the American psyche failed to acknowledge the flu as the war’s most prolific killer. Families, accustomed to absorbing grim news and long lists of the dead, processed the information about fatalities from influenza as part of the general horror of the war (Crosby 311). Flu remained a faceless and unnamed enemy. Alfred Crosby speculates: “Many people may have thought of the flu as simply a subdivision of the war” (320) rather than a disaster in its own right.

By the autumn of 1918, ships returning from Europe with flu-infected passengers had touched off the second wave of influenza on American soil. This time the disease spread quickly in the civilian population and fanned out from the major Eastern port cities to every state in the nation. During the week of October 23, 1918, there were 21,000 reported deaths in America from influenza, “the highest weekly mortality ever recorded in the United States from any cause at any time” (Bollet 106). Strict public health ordinances enacted in every major city sought to curb public gatherings and the spread of infection. Still, Americans turned their attention to the war effort with surprising zeal. In Philadelphia, in spite of many hundreds of influenza deaths reported daily, 200,000 people gathered to watch a Liberty Loan Drive parade that stretched for twenty-three city blocks (Crosby 72). Movie stars and politicians, including President Wilson himself, presided over similar events in New York and Boston. Some 10,000 people marched through the streets of San Francisco on that same day “escorting

an effigy of the Kaiser nailed into a coffin” (93), and on October 6, 150,000 gathered in Golden Gate Park for a war rally. The emotional momentum of American response to World War I ran far too strong for the flu to divert much attention.

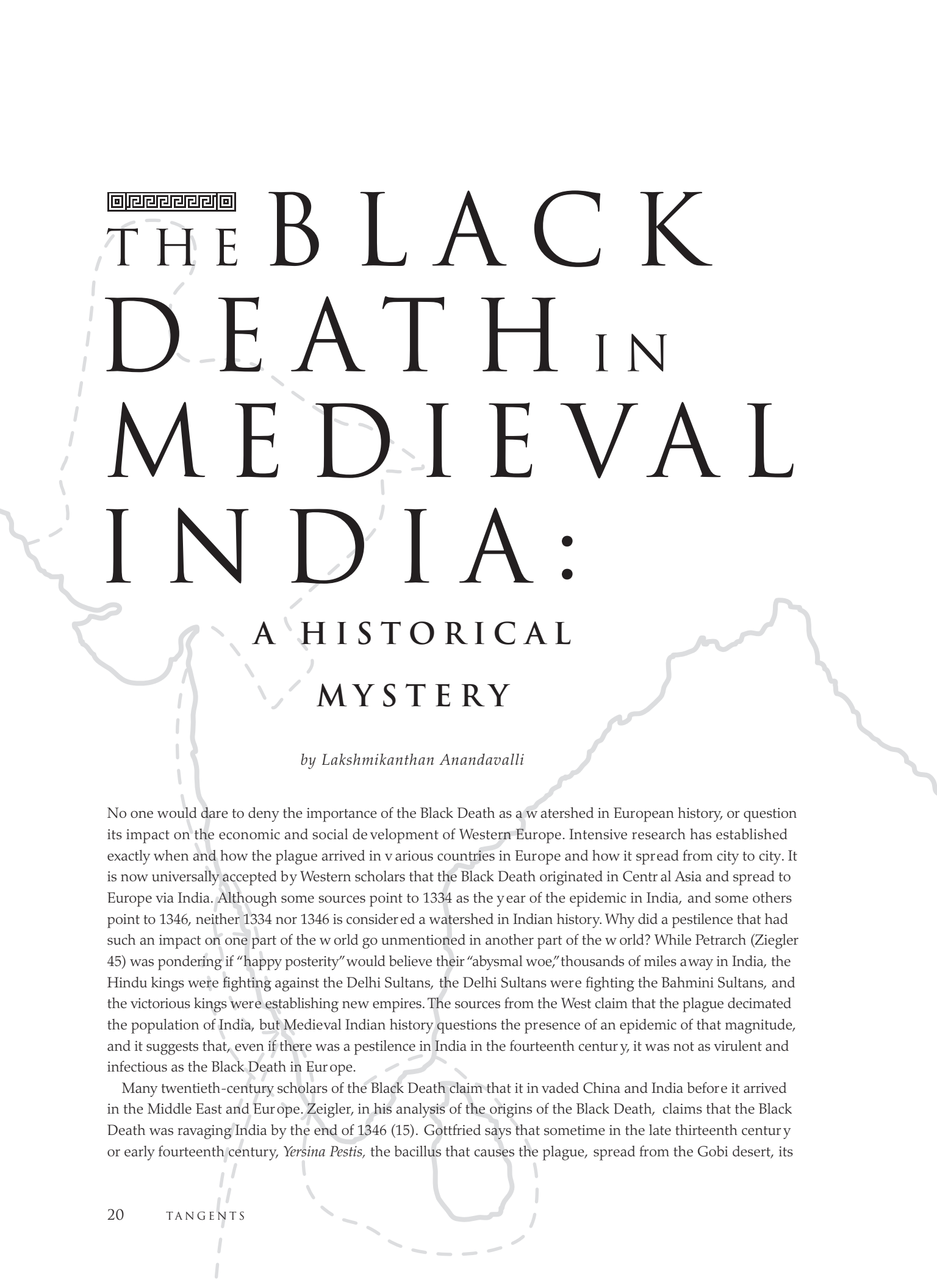
On November 11, 1918, the Germans signed a general armistice and, six hours later, the guns in Europe fell silent (Aronson 84). Euphoria swept across America and the world. The ghastly war had finally come to an end. Americans celebrated all day and into the night. They tossed aside gauze masks and all influenza-related caution and ran into streets across the nation to sing, dance, and drink toasts. In New York City, “any soldier who ventured into Times Square was kissed passionately by throngs of jubilant, grateful women” (86). Ironically, November of 1918 saw the numbers of influenza deaths in the United States begin a gradual decline. The epidemic had slowed, but had certainly not ended. Still, all wariness about the influenza vanished in the atmosphere of hopeful jubilation and sense of victory that the Armistice ignited. Believing that the time of crisis had passed, Americans defied public health rules and celebrated with abandon. A few weeks later, a third wave of influenza had taken hold in America, killing many through the first months of 1919 (Crosby 114).

The influenza pandemic of 1918–1919 killed tens of millions of people worldwide. It clearly remains “one of the most devastating epidemics in history” (Bollet 103). Nothing else—no disease, war, or famine—has killed so many in as short a period. How could an event as devastating as the “Spanish” flu drop from America’s collective memory for eighty years? The epidemic ran its deadly course at a peculiar and complex moment in the history of the mankind. The developed world was engulfed in a horrifying war of unprecedented violence. Americans stood stunned as the world fell apart around them. Medical science had advanced by 1918 to previously unknown levels of understanding and confidence. Yet doctors found themselves helpless against a mysterious virus that they initially thought was “just the flu.” Bewildered and impotent to fight this enemy at home, Americans found “the only way to lend dignity to their battles with disease was to subsume them within the war” (320).

Few took on the task of recording the American experience with the plague of influenza. Whether the story was too painful to tell, or whether Americans failed to perceive influenza as the story at all, “historians have relegated the worst epidemic in modern history to the sidelines of human memory” (Byerly 188).

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THE BLACK DEATH IN MEDIÉVAL INDIA: A HISTORICAL MYSTERY

by Lakshmikanthan Anandavalli

No one would dare to deny the importance of the Black Death as a watershed in European history, or question its impact on the economic and social development of Western Europe. Intensive research has established exactly when and how the plague arrived in various countries in Europe and how it spread from city to city. It is now universally accepted by Western scholars that the Black Death originated in Central Asia and spread to Europe via India. Although some sources point to 1334 as the year of the epidemic in India, and some others point to 1346, neither 1334 nor 1346 is considered a watershed in Indian history. Why did a pestilence that had such an impact on one part of the world go unmentioned in another part of the world? While Petrarch (Ziegler 45) was pondering if “happy posterity” would believe their “abysmal woe,” thousands of miles away in India, the Hindu kings were fighting against the Delhi Sultans, the Delhi Sultans were fighting the Bahmini Sultans, and the victorious kings were establishing new empires. The sources from the West claim that the plague decimated the population of India, but Medieval Indian history questions the presence of an epidemic of that magnitude, and it suggests that, even if there was a pestilence in India in the fourteenth century, it was not as virulent and infectious as the Black Death in Europe.

Many twentieth-century scholars of the Black Death claim that it invaded China and India before it arrived in the Middle East and Europe. Ziegler, in his analysis of the origins of the Black Death, claims that the Black Death was ravaging India by the end of 1346 (15). Gottfried says that sometime in the late thirteenth century or early fourteenth century, *Yersinia Pestis*, the bacillus that causes the plague, spread from the Gobi desert, its

permanent locus, “east into China, south into India, and west across Central Asia to the Middle East and the Mediterranean Basin” (33). Aberth suggests that the disease originated in the land of the Mongols and invaded China and India before it spread to Europe (12). Sticker, a twentieth-century historian of epidemiology, asserts that there was a plague in India in 1332 and again in 1344, and he argues that the plague originated in India (qtd. in Dols 44).

Support for the claim that the Black Death visited India before it spread to Europe comes from the chronicles of medieval merchants of Venice and Genoa, medieval historians from the Middle East, and other chroniclers of Europe. Gabriele de’ Mussi, a thirteenth-century chronicler from Piacenza, wrote an account of the Black Death in which he mentioned that almost everyone in the East, including the population of India, was affected by the pestilence (Ziegler 15). An anonymous Flemish cleric wrote that in Greater India it rained frogs, serpents, lizards, scorpions and many venomous beasts and, on the third day, the whole province was infected (Ziegler 14). We should be aware that when a medieval merchant from Venice or Genoa refers to Greater India, he is referring to the region bounded by Central Asia in the north and Indonesia in the south. Marco Polo, the Venetian traveler from the thirteenth century, explains the three terms used by the merchants: “the Greater India” extends from Mabar to Kesmacoran, “the Lesser India” commences at Ziampa and extends to Murphili, and “the Middle India” includes Abascia (316). Mabar refers to a part of South India, Abascia refers to modern-day Ethiopia, and Ziampa refers to modern-day Vietnam (Fig. 1). In 1348, the medical faculty of Paris wrote that the cause of the Black Death lay in the war between the sun and the sea near India (Ziegler 14).

Modern epidemiological studies have established that the plague was endemic in the Central Asian Steppes, spreading from Central Asia to the West in the fourteenth century. One of the epidemiological theories attributes the spread of the Black Death to Europe from Central Asia to the expansion of the Mongol Empire that linked China, India, the Middle East and Europe (Gottfried 33). Another theory suggests that the Black Death traveled along the trade routes. Both trade routes that connected the East with the West in the fourteenth century include India: the caravan route from China to Central Asia to Europe and the sea route along south Asia from ports in the Indian Ocean to the Persian Gulf. All these data provide justification for the claim that the Black Death visited India before it reached Europe.

Conspicuous by absence in this argument are historical records from India that substantiate the claim that there was a plague in India in the fourteenth century. This raises a question as to whether there are any historical records for that period originating from India. Until the eleventh century, sources for the history of India come from archaeological records, literary works, monographs, and inscriptions on monuments. The art of writing history began in India with the arrival of the Turkish invaders in the eleventh century. From 1332 to 1347, most of North India was ruled by Muhammed bin Tughlaq, and the history of this period is deduced from the chronicles of the Muslim historians, the travel logs of travelers from different parts of the world to India, and the writings of contemporary literary men. Ziyauddin Barani, Muhammed bin Tughlaq’s companion (*nadim*), compiled *Tarikh-i-Firoz Shahi* in 1357, chronicling the history of India from 1266 to 1357. He is a principal authority for the medieval period. Ibn-Battuta, a Moorish traveler to India, wrote a detailed account of the events from 1334 to 1347 in his *Rihla*, the Book of Travels. He traveled extensively throughout India, from Delhi in the north to Madurai in the south (Fig. 2). While Sultan Muhammed ruled the greater part of North India from 1325 to 1351, Harihara and Bukka established a Hindu kingdom in South India in 1336, and this dynasty ruled South India until 1485. There is abundant information available about this empire from inscriptions, writings of the Muslim historians, literary compositions, and travel logs of the Portuguese, Italian, and Chinese visitors. With so much information available from India, there should be a correspondence between the chronicles of the Italian merchants and the Indian historical records. Indians interpreted epidemics as a sign of the gods’ displeasure: smallpox is associated with the wrath of Goddess *Sitala* in the north and Goddess *Mariamamma* in the south, and cholera is associated with Goddess *Candi*. Records of rituals in the fourteenth century for a god or goddess associated with plague may also indicate the presence of an epidemic.

Hecker mentions that the population of India was decimated in the fourteenth century, and although Hecker does not explicitly attribute it to the Black Death, Ziegler considers this a result of the plague (15), and Gottfried expresses a similar belief (36). On the other hand, Medieval Indian History provides a different explanation for this decimation. On his arrival at Delhi in 1334, Ibn-Battuta finds Delhi “empty and unpopulated save for a few inhabitants” (Dunn 196), but he does not mention an epidemic. Historians Haig and Majumdar attribute this

depopulation to Sultan Muhammed's decision to move the capital from Delhi to Daulatabad. The contemporary historian Barani writes that when the Sultan forced everyone to move with their families, people were heartbroken, and many of them died on the way to Daulatabad. When they reached Daulatabad, it became "a graveyard of Muslims" (Barani 239). Another explanation for this loss of life, which is also well documented by both Barani and Ibn-Battuta, was the severe seven-year famine that hit India in 1335. From Ibn-Battuta's *Rihla* we know that towns and whole districts were wiped out (qtd. in Haig 152). Ibn-Battuta observed that Indians were reduced to eating animal skins, rotten meat, and even human flesh (Dunn 204). Barani also mentions that in the fatal famine, "thousands of people perished of want" (Barani 238). Neither Barani nor Ibn-Battuta mentions a plague even though they describe the ravages of the famine in detail. What would be the motivation for both of them to hide that information?

Ziegler implies that Ibn-Battuta is reluctant to speak freely about the plague, which he witnessed. "Almost the only man known to have been at or near the spot, Ibn-Battuta, is disappointingly reticent" (Ziegler 14). There are two problems with his statement: First, if there was a plague in India, Ibn-Battuta was not the only one who could have observed it; there were other historians. Second, why would Ibn-Battuta be reticent about

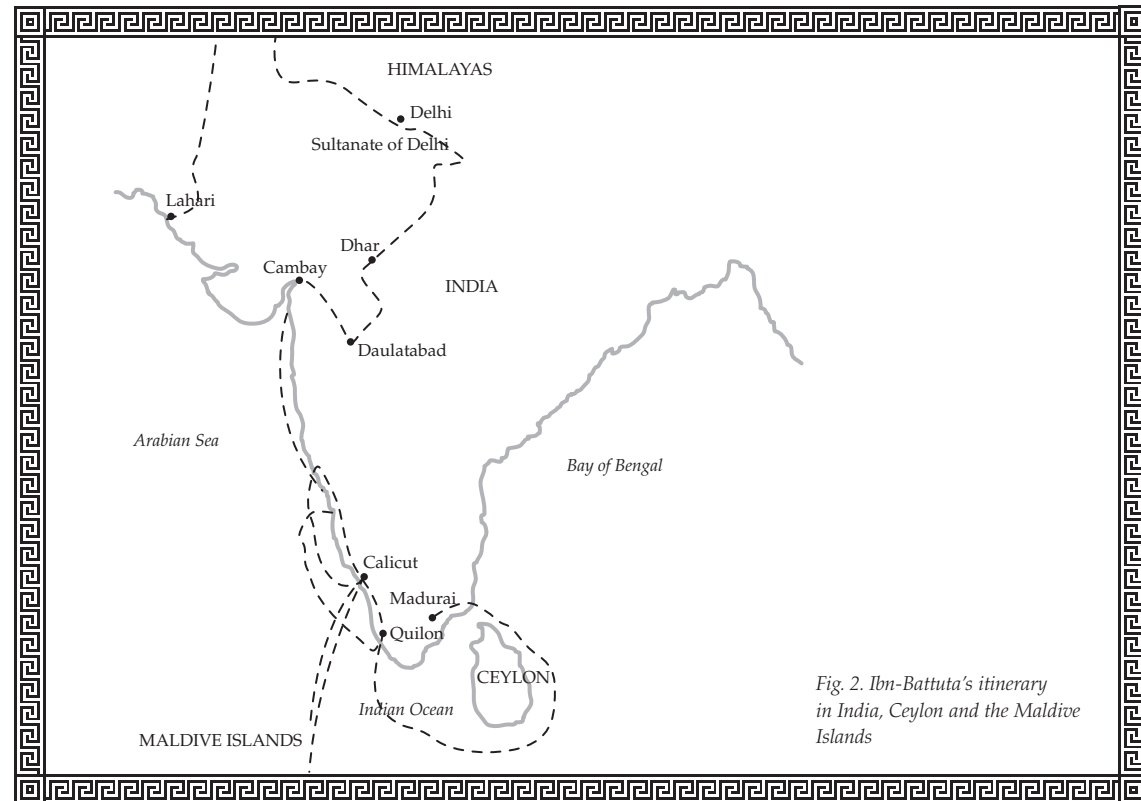


Fig. 2. Ibn-Battuta's itinerary in India, Ceylon and the Maldives Islands

the plague? Is he reluctant to admit the loss of humanity in the places the Black Death visited? He is not reluctant to write about people turning into cannibals. Is it the horror of the epidemic? Medieval India was not a happy valley; Sultan Muhammed waged wars to expand his empire. Heads of Hindu kings who lost in war were brought in and hung upon the ramparts of forts. Ibn-Battuta witnessed villagers being impaled on stakes in Madurai by Ghiyath al-udin. He also saw the skin of King Ballala III, who lost to Ghiyath al-udin, stuffed with straw hanging upon the wall of Madurai (Dunn 245). If we assume that Ibn-Battuta or Barani is silent about the Black Death, it cannot be because of the horror of the epidemic.

Ziegler follows his criticism of Ibn-Battuta with a comment about a Flemish cleric: "An anonymous Flemish cleric, on the other hand, was fortunately unfettered by the restrictions imposed on those who have actually seen what they describe" (14). This statement implies that some restrictions prevented Ibn-Battuta from talking about the plague. But Ibn-Battuta does not hesitate to talk about the plague he sees in Syria, so why should he feel restricted in India? "The entire population of the city joined in the exodus, male and female, small and

large, the Jews went out with their book of the law and the Christians with their Gospel, their women and children with them" (Dunn 270). Since India and Syria were both under Islamic rule, if he was able to write about the plague in Syria, the restrictions cannot originate from his Islamic beliefs.

However, Barani and Ibn-Battuta report two epidemics, one in 1335 and another in 1344, and Sticker claims that those two epidemics were plagues. Barani describes the epidemic in 1335 in Warangal: "The Sultan arrived at Warangal where *waba* (pestilence) was prevalent. Several nobles and many other persons died of it. The Sultan was also attacked" (Barani 243). Ibn-Battuta also mentions that an epidemic broke out that wiped out half of the Sultan's troops in Sargadwari near Warangal (Dunn 205). The half that survived went back to Delhi with Sultan Muhammed, and they did not infect other people in Delhi. The second one, the epidemic in Madurai, was witnessed by Ibn-Battuta. When he arrives at Madurai in 1344, he finds the people of Madurai dying of an epidemic: "There he found the population in the throes of an epidemic so lethal that whoever caught infection died on the morrow, or the day after, and if not the third day, then on the fourth" (Dunn 245). Let us examine the epidemiology of the pestilence in Madurai to compare it with that of the Black Death in Europe. On his arrival, Ibn-Battuta buys a slave girl in Madurai, but she dies the following day. Ibn-Battuta describes her as a healthy girl, which implies the absence of buboes, so we can rule out bubonic plague. The pestilence he describes is arguably as virulent as pneumonic plague, but Ibn-Battuta does not describe any blood spitting. Also, Ibn-Battuta, who falls sick, recovers from his illness. Since the victims of pneumonic plague did not survive, it is questionable if the pestilence was pneumonic plague.

In addition, the pestilence did not spread like pneumonic plague in Europe. Ibn-Battuta and his small entourage leave Madurai and reach Quilon where he stays for three months, recovering from his illness (Dunn 246). He does not mention any pestilence in Quilon, which is only about 204 kms (127 miles) from Madurai,

WHY HAVE INDIAN SOURCES NOT BEEN CONSULTED FOR SO LONG?

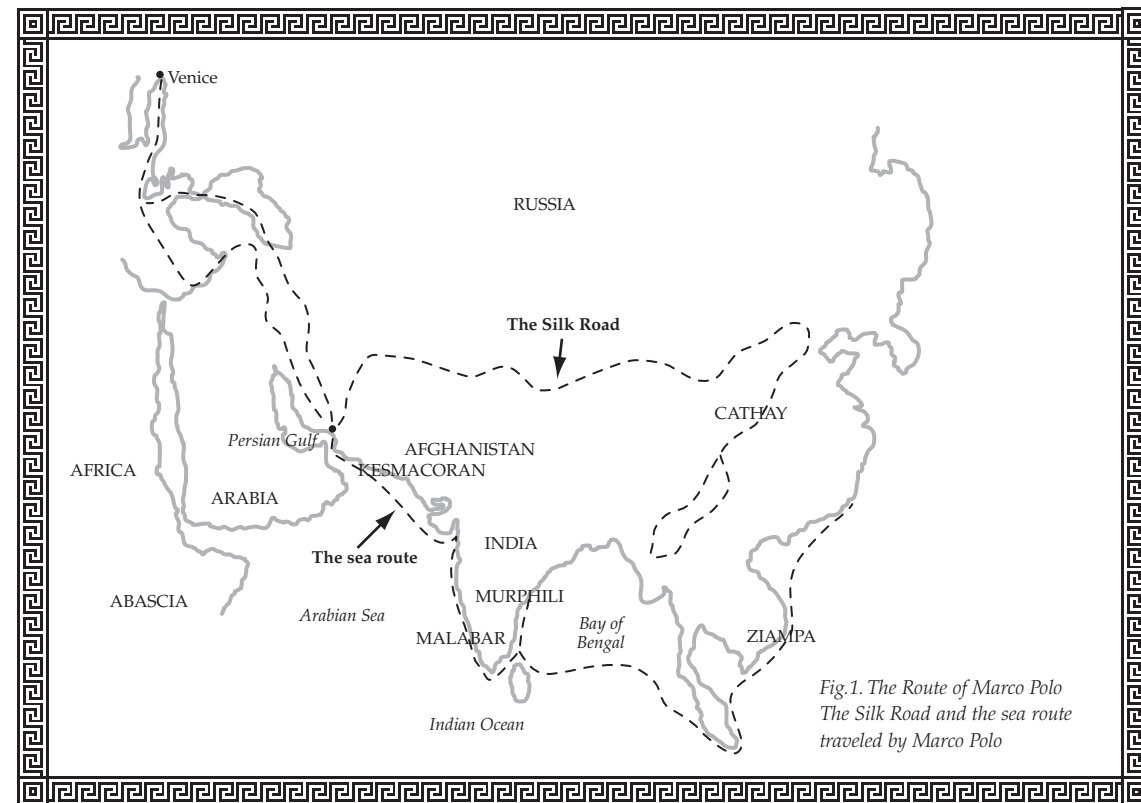
and no one contracts the pestilence from Ibn-Battuta or his entourage, who were supposedly exposed to it in Madurai. He leaves for China, meets with a mishap in the ocean, and reaches Calicut on the west coast of India about 367 kms (228 miles) from Quilon (Fig. 2). He leaves for China again in May 1345 and returns to Quilon sometime in December 1346 or January 1347 (Dunn 266). The distance between Florence and Marseilles is about 650 kms (403 miles), almost three times the distance between Madurai and Quilon. The plague reached France a month or two after the first breakout in Italy, but the epidemic he saw in Madurai did not reach Quilon or Calicut, which are within 400 kms of each other.

One can argue that there was more traffic on the sea route from Florence to Marseilles than there was in Calicut or Quilon. But historical records prove that Quilon and Calicut were busy ports on the spice route. When Ibn-Battuta arrives in Calicut, he sees thirteen Chinese junks wintering at Calicut. He also meets Chinese merchants and Syrian ships en route to the Persian Gulf (Dunn 226). Madurai, the capital of the Pandyan kingdom, was a prosperous commercial center. Wassaf, a thirteenth-century Persian historian, remarks on how busy the ports were in the Pandyan kingdom: "The curiosities of Chin (China) and Machin (Canton) and the beautiful products of Hind and Sind, laden on large ships are always arriving here" (Wassaf 32). If the epidemic in Madurai was the Black Death as Sticker claims it to be, it should have spread along the trade route in the west coast of India (Fig. 2) where the traders were continuously coming from various countries.

An important point to consider in this discussion is that Ibn-Battuta's *Rihla* is in Arabic, and since we are reading the English translation of it, it is important to discuss the two Arabic words, *taun* and *waba*. In Arabic, *taun* means plague and *waba* means pestilence (Dols 44). Interestingly, historians of the nineteenth and twentieth century are not consistent in their translations. The epidemic at Warangal mentioned by Ibn-Battuta and Barani is translated as plague by some historians and cholera by some others. Majumdar writes that there was a cholera epidemic at Warangal (75). Haig, in his 1928 *History of India*, says that the pestilence in Warangal probably was

cholera (149), and the pestilence in Madurai also was cholera (150). But *The Oxford History of India* from 1958 says that both the Sultan and his army contracted plague (Spear 304). Whereas Ibn-Battuta uses the Arabic word for plague, *taun*, to describe the plague in Damascus, he uses the word *waba* to describe the disease in Madurai (Dols 44). Dols claims that assertions by historians that Ibn-Battuta witnessed plague in India are unwarranted, because Ibn-Battuta calls it a pestilence (44). There appears to be no evidence from Indian sources to support the assertion that there was a plague in India in the fourteenth century. It is likely that merchant chroniclers who traveled along the Silk Road witnessed and wrote about the plague that was ravaging parts of Asia, north of India. What they meant by India in their chronicles is probably not part of India now.

Muslim historians Barani and Ibn-Battuta focus on the reign of Sultan Muhammed, who ruled most of North India. During this period, South India liberated itself from Muslim rule. Interestingly, the pestilence in Warangal, and the rumors of the Sultan's death that followed, resulted in many uprisings in the south and led to the establishment of the Vijayanagar Empire (City of Victory). The coronation of Harihara I, the king of the Vijayanagar Empire, was celebrated on 18 April 1336 (Sastri 217). Inscriptions tell us that there was a great festival to celebrate this establishment of a Hindu empire in 1346 (Sastri 218). Between 1336 and 1346, the Vijayanagar



kings did not seem to have faced any impediments; they waged wars with Muslim kings and annexed more cities. The Vijayanagar Empire was so prosperous and glorious that South Indian art and architecture flourished during this period. Considering that the Black Death resulted in the breakdown of social order in Europe, it is questionable whether it would have been possible to establish an empire successfully if there had been a plague raging.

For the sake of argument, if we assume that for some unknown reason India is reticent to talk about the Black Death, then India should also be silent about the plagues of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries too. The socio-political landscape continued to be the same for two hundred years; India had remained a predominantly Hindu country ruled by Muslim invaders, the Arabs, the Turks, the Afghans and the Persians. While the invaders continued their *jihad* on the Hindu infidels and plundered Hindustan, the Hindu kings revolted, wars were fought, and people died in the thousands. In this atmosphere, the plague of the sixteenth century did not go unmentioned. Sultan Quili Qutab Shah commemorated the eradication of the plague by building a triumphal

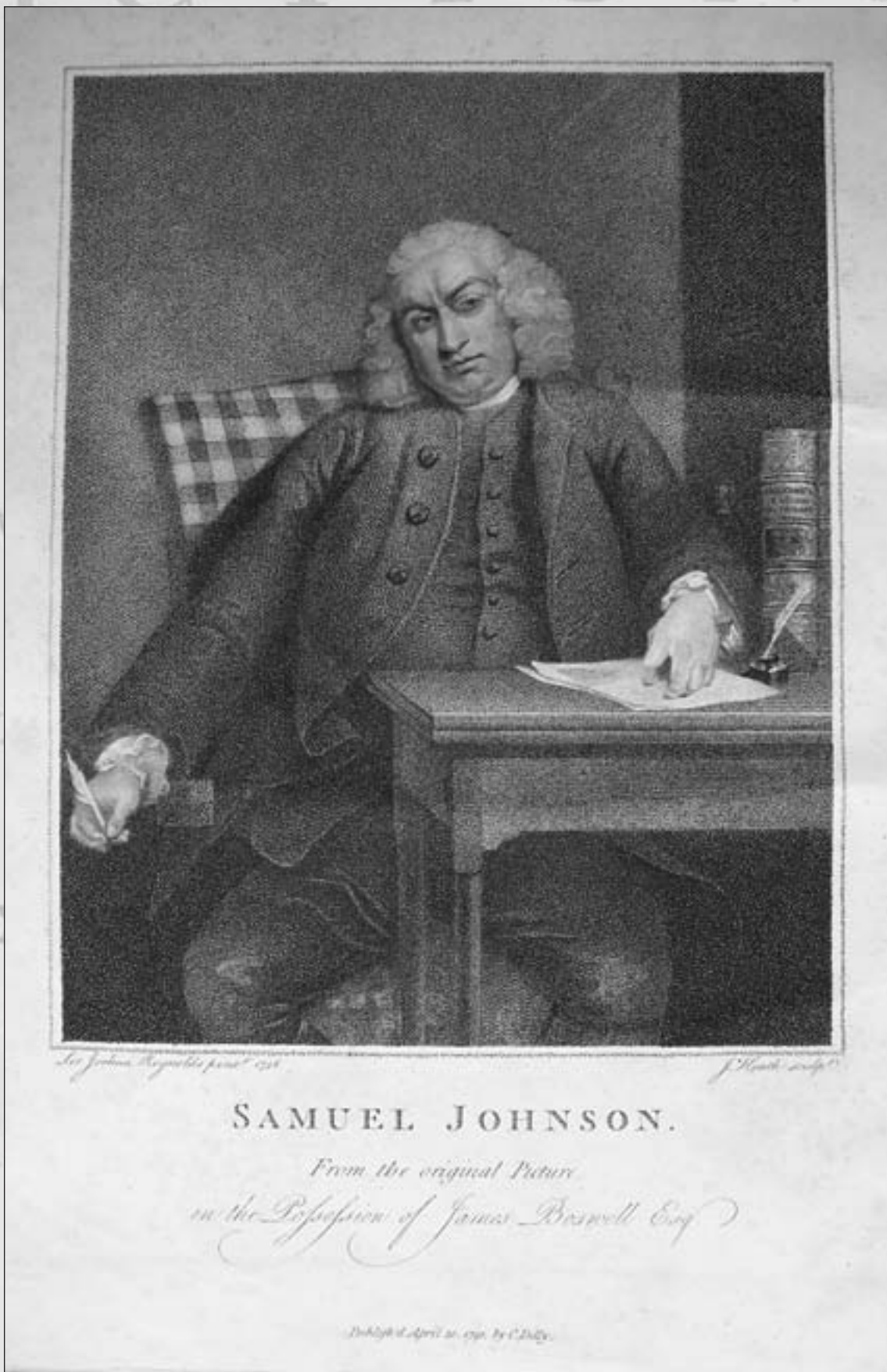
arch in Hyderabad in 1591. In the seventeenth century, Mutamad Khan writes that whole villages were swept away by the hand of death: "Houses full of the dead were left locked, and no person dared to go near them through fear of his life" (406). In 1689, Khafi Khan, an historian, reports in *Muntakhabu-L Lunar* that the plague (*taun*) and pestilence (*waba*), which had been ravaging Dakhin (South India) for several years, had spread to Bijapur. He describes the visible marks of the plague: "swellings as big as a grape or banana under the arms, behind the ears, and in the groin" (337). His words demonstrate the anguish and despair felt by the Indians, which is not unlike that felt by the people of Europe when confronted with the plague:

The black-pated guest slayer of the sky sought to pick out the seed of the human race from the field of the world, and the cold blast of the destruction tried to cut down the tree of life in every living being and to remove every shoot and sign of life from the surface of the world. (337)

Western scholars have relied exclusively on western sources to support their claim that the plague visited India on the way to Europe. Why have Indian sources not been consulted for so long? Since Indian sources tell a different story, shouldn't we reexamine the narrative of how the plague spread to the west? Is it not possible that the path of the Black Death, on its way to Europe, was along the Silk Road, devastating parts of Asia, but avoiding India? If there was no plague in India in the fourteenth century, couldn't the plague have spread from Europe to India in the sixteenth century?

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SAMUEL JOHNSON
AT LIFE'S PRECIPICE

by John P. Devine

In 1747, the erudite Samuel Johnson proclaimed that in three years he would produce the first dictionary of the English language by individual effort. Questions inevitably arose about the implausibility of such a venture, since the forty members of the French Academy took forty years to compile a dictionary of the French language. To such questions, Johnson pithily replied, "Let me see; forty times forty is sixteen hundred. As three to sixteen hundred, so is the proportion of an Englishman to a Frenchman" (Boswell 135). But Johnson erred. He took six years to complete his staggering achievement. Given Johnson's intellectual acuity and verbal ingenuity, a difficulty arises in understanding him, especially the profound religious beliefs and doubts that persistently struggled within him. The difficulty diminishes, to some degree, when looking at him during his last days.

If the cessation of a person's life becomes inevitable, but not abrupt, an intellectual desire typically arises to probe established beliefs and unresolved doubts. Indeed, Johnson once famously quipped, "Depend on it, Sir, when a man knows he is to be hanged in a fortnight, it concentrates his mind wonderfully" (Boswell 849). Johnson's mind—concentrated or otherwise—was immensely complicated. Accordingly, any attempt to perform a cursory examination of the beliefs and doubts attending the last weeks of his life is ill advised. Instead, looking at certain deliberations by Johnson regarding key concepts—*life, idleness, fear, solitude, dignity, and death*—captures the dominant concerns that directed his views about life's temporal conclusion and potential eternal dawn.

LIFE. *n.f.* plural *lives*. [*livian*, to live, Saxon.]

1. Union and cooperation of soul with body; vitality; animation, as opposed to *inanimate state*.

Let the waters bring forth abundantly the moving creature that hath *life*.

Gen. i. 20.

The identity of the same man consists in nothing but a participation of the same continued *life*, by constantly fleeting particles of matter, in succession vitally united to the same organized body.

Locke.

While Locke's description of life provides an interesting thumbnail version of our biological existence, it altogether ignores two questions that perpetually vex humans. What to do before the fleeting particles of matter ultimately disassemble? Why? Samuel Johnson provided a few insights. He prominently observed that people should not waste too much time attempting to form a set direction for their lives. He noted that life is largely punctuated by fortuitous events. When James Boswell, who is best known as the biographer of Samuel Johnson, wrote to him seeking advice to overcome his irresolution, Johnson replied in a letter,

Life is not long, and too much of it must not pass in idle deliberation how it shall be spent; deliberation, which those who begin it by prudence, and continue it with subtlety, must, after long expense of thought, conclude by chance. To prefer one future mode of life to another, upon just reasons, requires faculties which it has not pleased our Creator to give us. (Boswell 368)

This notion of the capricious direction of an individual's life arises time and time again. Johnson's view most plausibly comes from the innumerable uncertainties that attended his own life. In youth, he suffered so severely from scrofula that he sought the healing touch of Queen Anne because of the prevalent superstitious notion about the salutary benefits of a regal touch. As a young man, he also suffered mentally to such a degree that he turned to religion. He endured the deaths of his closest family members — at the age of twenty-two the death of his father, at twenty-eight the death of his brother, and at forty-three the death of his wife. Moreover, for many years before the publication of his extraordinary dictionary, he led an impoverished existence. All of these circumstances created enormous turmoil in Johnson's life.



I HAVE MADE NO REFORMATION; I HAVE LIVED TOTALLY USELESS, MORE SENSUAL IN THOUGHT, AND MORE ADDICTED TO WINE AND MEAT



This turbulent nature undoubtedly framed his thoughts, especially on life itself. Boswell wrote of Johnson:

He used frequently to observe, that there was more to be endured than enjoyed, in the general condition of human life; and frequently quoted those lines of Dryden:

'Strange cozenage! None would live past years again,
Yet all hope pleasure from what still remain.'

For his part, he said, he never passed that week in his life which he would wish to repeat, were an angel to make the proposal to him. (Boswell 442)

This is an extraordinary statement, apparently reflecting Johnson's belief that past weeks and years offered nothing worthy of repetition. It reflects his detachment, and his corresponding unwillingness to cling to the past. The statement also reveals Johnson's

belief about the ephemeral nature of our lives. He thought that the sum total of a person's existence extended beyond death. Consequently, the past was not nearly as compelling as the future for Johnson.

Johnson repeatedly focused his intellectual sights well beyond the cares of everyday life, as both *The Vanity of the Human Wishes* and *Rasselas* demonstrate. Boswell observed that in composing *Rasselas*, "Johnson meant by shewing the insufficiency of nature of things temporal, to direct the hopes of man to things eternal" (Boswell 242). Citing a few lines from each work buttresses Boswell's observation. For instance, in *The Vanity of Human Wishes*, Johnson emphasized,

For faith, that panting for a happier seat,
Counts death kind Nature's signal of retreat:
These goods for man the laws of heaven ordain,
These goods he grants, who grants the power to gain;
With these celestial wisdom calms the mind,
And makes the happiness she does not find.
(Greene 21)

Likewise, in the penultimate section of *Rasselas*, Johnson created the following interchange between Rasselas and the princess:

'Those that lie here stretched before us, the wise and powerful of ancient times, warn us to remember the shortness of our present state; they were, perhaps, snatched away while they were busy, like us, in the choice of life.'

'To me,' said the princess, 'the choice of life is become less important; I hope hereafter to think only on the choice of eternity.' (Greene 418)

Thus, Johnson accentuated his faith and belief in something more enlightening and enduring than mundane life.

The experiences of his life also informed his view about eternal life to such a degree, that life and death became inextricably intertwined. Interestingly enough, the lines were written at critical junctures in Johnson's life—*The Vanity of Human Wishes* in 1749, while he painstakingly worked on his planned dictionary, and *Rasselas* in 1759, soon after his mother, and last immediate relative, died.

Even though Johnson worked assiduously on his writing at different times, his life was interspersed with periods of idleness.

IDLENESS. *n.f.* [from *idle*]

1. Laziness; sloth; sluggishness; aversion from labour.
Nor is excess the only thing by which sin breaks men

in their health, and the comfortable enjoyment of themselves, but many are also brought to a very ill and languishing habit of body by mere *idleness*, and *idleness*, is both a great sin, and the cause of many more. *South's Sermons*.

Boswell first mentions the idleness of Johnson as occurring during his teenage years, when Johnson returned from Stourbridge School, and "he passed in what he thought idleness, and was scolded by his father for his want of steady application" (Boswell 43). Then Boswell mentions an October 1729 entry in Johnson's diary, which includes a "spirited resolution to contend against his natural indolence." It read, ". . . I bid farewell to Sloth, being resolved henceforth not to listen to her syren strains" (Boswell 54). Perhaps Johnson sensed the ensuing Homeric struggle that he would wage against idleness. To be sure, Boswell cites repeated subsequent journal entries by Johnson, customarily on or close to Easter, where Johnson anguishes over his idleness. For instance, Boswell cited the following entry:

Good Friday, April 20, 1764. I have made no reformation; I have lived totally useless, more sensual in thought, and more addicted to wine and meat. . . . My indolence, since my last reception of the sacrament, has sunk into grosser sluggishness, and my dissipation spread into wilder negligence. . . . This is not the life to which heaven is promised. (Boswell 341)

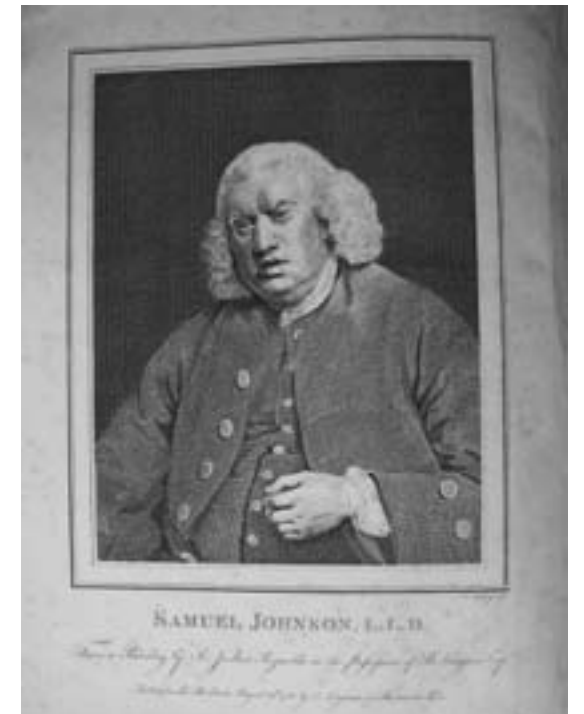
Johnson believed that his idleness, along with its corresponding evils, created a potential and substantial impediment to enjoying eternal life. Despite believing this, he was apparently incapable of altering his actions. An argument could be made that Johnson's inability to change course arose because his personal standards were unrealistically high. Boswell certainly alludes to this. Moreover, Johnson was rigorous and scrupulous, even unduly harsh, in any assessments of his efforts. At the time of his greatest literary triumph—the publication of his dictionary—he focused his preface to the monumental work on its perceived deficiencies rather than its decided merits.

Unfortunately, Johnson's perception of his own idleness and his repeated inability to bid farewell to it, darkly clouded his life, just as did his fears.

FEAR. *n.f.* [Sax. to fear; *vaer*, Dut., *feakle*, Erfe]

1. Dread; horror; painful apprehension of danger.
Fear is an uneasiness of the mind, upon the thought of future evil likely to befall us.
Locke.

For Johnson, the purpose of fear — alerting the individual at certain instances to real danger or evil—precluded any attempt to reduce its prominence in the mind. Rather, a person must acknowledge the presence of fear, but similarly recognize that any existing fear must become ancillary to reason. He realized the difficulty of achieving this balance. In *Rasselas*, he perceived, "No man will be found in whose mind airy notions do not sometimes tyrannize, and force him to hope or fear beyond the limits of sober probability" (Greene 405-06).



Such was the case for Johnson personally, who was tyrannized by the fear of death. As Boswell noted, "He feared death, but he feared nothing else, not even what might occasion death" (Boswell 579)—the dread was not of dying itself. As Johnson had stated, "It matters not how a man dies, but how he lives. The act of dying is not of importance, it lasts so short a time" (Boswell 427). As a result, it becomes clear that Johnson's dread arose from concern about whether he had lived his life in a manner that would merit an eternal reward. So his renowned fear only tangentially

arose from death itself. The fear, more precisely, arose from Johnson's belief that, upon his death, a determination would be made about his soul and eternal life.

Johnson's thought regarding death affected his deliberations on solitude.

SOLITUDE. *n.f.* [solitude, Fr.; solitudo, Lat.]

1. Lonely life; state of being alone.

It had been hard to have put more truth and untruth together, in a few words, than in that speech; whosoever is delighted with *solitude*, is either a wild beast or a god.

Bacon.

2. Loneliness; remoteness from company.



IT MATTERS NOT HOW A MAN DIES, BUT HOW HE LIVES



The distinguished French social historian Philippe Aries noted, "There is a fundamental difference between the intimate death shown at the end of the eighteenth century and the death in solitude" (Aries 105). In this regard, Johnson was a man of his times. Although years earlier he had been more indecisive on the matter when he stated, "I know not, whether I should wish to have a friend by me, or have it all between God and myself" (Boswell 416). From accounts about the last few weeks before Johnson's death, it becomes obvious that a large number of devoted people surrounded Johnson. But notably absent from this number were any of Johnson's immediate family, since all of Johnson's closest relatives—his wife, parents, and brother—preceded him in death.

Johnson attempted to avoid the solitude of approaching death, as well as dispatch the lingering moral scruples about the manner in which he had lived his life, by seeking the consolatory words of others. Boswell recounted an exchange between Johnson and Dr. Brocklesby approximately a week before Johnson's death. As Boswell reported,

... he seemed very low and desponding, and said, 'I have been as a dying man all night.' He then emphatically broke out, in the words of Shakespeare:

'Can'st thou not minister to a mind diseas'd;
Pluck from memory a rooted sorrow;
Raze out the written troubles of the brain;
And, with some sweet oblivious antidote,
Cleanse the stuff'd bosom of that perilous stuff,
Which weighs upon the heart?'

To which, Dr. Brocklesby readily answered, from the great poet:

'—therein the patient
Must minister to himself.' (Boswell 1379)

Johnson did minister to himself, and by nearly all accounts, effectively so. In contrast to his previous dread of death, a calm overcame him in his last days and hours. As Dr. Brocklesby would later relate, "For some time before his death, all his fears were calmed and absorbed by the prevalence of his faith, and his trust in the merits and propitiation of Jesus Christ" (Boswell 1391).

Dignity in the final moment of life was not only important culturally in the eighteenth century, but also important to Johnson personally.

DIGNITY. *n.f.* [*dignitas*, Latin]

2. Grandeur of mien; elevation of aspect.

Some men have a native *dignity*, which will procure them more regard by a look, than others can obtain by the most imperious commands.

Richardson.

More than three decades earlier, Johnson had written the following on the loss of dignity in old age:

In life's last scene what prodigies surprise,
Fears of the brave, and follies of the wise?
From Marlborough's eyes the streams of dotage flow,
And Swift expires a driveller and a show.
(Greene 20, *The Vanity of Human Wishes*, lines 315-318)

For decades then, Johnson gave at least some thought to the dignity of a person's final moments. Upon learning that he would not recover, he stated that he would "take no more physick, not even my opiates; for I have prayed that I may render my soul to God unclouded" (Boswell 1390). He did not want his mind falsely altered as he approached death. As a later observer noticed, "If Johnson had not feared death, there would have been little bravery in this remark; but, with his known fear of the last enemy, it shows exceeding fortitude" (Armitage 374).

Johnson's fortitude thereby enhanced the dignity he so highly regarded that was supposed to accompany an individual's death.

No reasonable doubt exists that Johnson died in peace. A week before his death, in a spectacular display of faith, reason, and piety, Johnson prayed,

Almighty and most merciful father, I am now, as to human eyes it seems, about to commemorate, for the last time, the death of the Son Jesus Christ our Saviour and Redeemer. Grant, O Lord, that my whole hope and confidence may be in his merits, and thy mercy; enforce and accept my imperfect repentance; make this commemoration available to the confirmation of my faith, the establishment of my hope, and the enlargement of my charity; and make the death of thy Son Jesus Christ effectual to my redemption. Have mercy upon me, and pardon my multitude of offences. Bless my friends; have mercy upon all men. Support me, by thy Holy Spirit, in the days of weakness and at the hour of death; and receive me, at my death, to everlasting happiness, for the sake of Jesus Christ. Amen. (Strahan 216-17)

A truly dignified moment, as the death that Johnson had so long contemplated rapidly approached.

DEATH. *n.f.* [Saxon]

1. The extinction of life; the departure of the soul from the body.

He is the mediator of the New Testament, that by means of *death*, for the redemption of the transgressions, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance.

Heb. ix. 15.

He must his acts reveal,
From the first moment of his vital breath,
To his last hour of unrepenting *death*.

Dryden.

So much about Samuel Johnson remains perplexing. A man who wrote the *Dictionary of the English Language* in six years, and composed *Rasselas* in the evenings of one week, but who was tortured by notions of his own idleness. A man who possessed virtually unequalled intellectual and conversational abilities, but who claimed that he never passed a week in his life that he wished to repeat. Given these complexities and ambiguities in Johnson, it is not surprising that he focused many hours of his life on thoughts about his final hour. And despite all his formidable talents and abilities and all his considerable doubts and beliefs, he possessed an easily formulated hope for his final hour. *In hora mortis meae, voca me. Et jube me venire ad te.* (In the hour of my death, call me. And bid me come to Thee.)

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SPEAKING SOMEWHAT
WILDLY:
IMPROVISATIONAL JAZZ
AS EMERSONIAN ACT

by Sarah Anderson

THE POET KNOWS THAT HE SPEAKS ADEQUATELY ONLY WHEN HE SPEAKS SOMEWHAT WILDLY, OR "WITH THE FLOWER OF THE MIND;" NOT WITH THE INTELLECT USED AS AN ORGAN, BUT WITH THE INTELLECT RELEASED FROM ALL SERVICE AND SUFFERED TO TAKE ITS DIRECTION FROM ITS CELESTIAL LIFE; OR AS THE ANCIENTS WERE WONT TO EXPRESS THEMSELVES, NOT WITH THE INTELLECT ALONE BUT WITH THE INTELLECT INEBRIATED BY NECTAR.

RALPH WALDO EMERSON (EMERSON 298-299)

How do I best live my life? In his lifelong exploration of this question, Ralph Waldo Emerson looked to nature as his moral guide. In many decades spent reading literature and observing nature, Emerson documented his insight and inspiration in essays, sermons, speeches and poetry. Mostly, he wanted to be a poet (Richardson 371). As Emerson experienced the dynamic forces at work in nature, he believed the poet's role was as one who must "unlock at all risks, his human doors," to the transformative power of the natural world and then democratically represent to all humankind, through his poetic expression, the possibility of that transformation. As nature inspired him, so must he, as a poet, inspire his fellow nineteenth-century human beings.

In the uniquely American, twentieth-century musical innovation of jazz improvisation, jazz musicians become modern Emersonian poets who "speak somewhat wildly...with the flower of the mind," embodying and manifesting in their improvisational act many Emersonian values. Like Emerson's poet, jazz musicians act as "liberating gods" for their audience by propelling a universal transformative "new energy" through their art, affirming "the one fact that the world hates; that the soul *becomes*" (Emerson 144).

Both Emerson's philosophy and the act of jazz improvisation begin with a set of assumptions: that the truth of life inhabits the present moment, and that one's awareness of individual subjectivity determines largely the authenticity of one's choices. In living life, these assumptions necessitate a set of actions; both Emerson and improvisational jazz celebrate the individual's uniqueness by transcending that individualism, or separateness, to tap into the expansive universal mind. The transcendentalists attempted this unification through their intimate relationship to the natural world; jazz musicians manifest it through pioneering experimentation in the act of improvisation.

In his essay "The Poet," Emerson discusses the special role of the poet in society, a weighty role that comes laden with responsibility to represent the universal mind through the medium of language. "The poet is ... the man without impediment, who sees and handles that which others dream of, traverses the whole scale of experience, and is representative of man, in virtue of being the largest power to receive and to impart... The poet is the sayer, the namer, and represents beauty" (Emerson 289).

The poet is necessary, a spiritual mediator between external and internal worlds, and a kind of priest of the universe, whose calling implies the duty to name beauty for the benefit of others. Since "we know that the secret of the world is profound, but who or what shall be our interpreter, we know not" (291), the poet gives breath to what we know to be essential, yet cannot ourselves name. He is not, however, a superior being, in Emerson's view.

For Emerson, the nature of that naming has a musical quality, and he suggests that poetry is in fact music, establishing a direct parallel between the poet and the musician and implying their mutual roles in society. Emerson seems to experience the world musically, to connect with the natural energy and vibrations of nature; he often referred to music in his descriptions of higher states: "... and the phrase will be the fittest, most musical, and the unerring voice of the world for that time" (291). Reinforcing the similarity between poet and musician, he calls poems "songs" and "melodies;" "So when the soul of the poet has come to ripeness of thought, she detaches and sends away from it its poems or songs...and infix[es] them irrevocably into the hearts of men... the melodies of the poet ascend and leap and pierce into the depths of infinite time" (297); "like the metamorphosis of things into higher organic forms is their change into melodies" (298); and "so the soul of the thing is reflected by a melody" (298). Emerson understood the implications of sound — both in speech and written poetry, as well as of musical sound — and its ability to inspire and therefore transform the "soul."

The task of actually living one's life and allowing the soul to become consciously closer to the universal mind is possible if one acts from one of Emerson's core convictions, which is the validation of the present moment. In his essay "Self Reliance," he bemoans the predominant state of mankind as living in either the past or the future, rather than harnessing the immediate energetic power of the present. "But man postpones or remembers; he does not live in the present, but with reverted eye laments the past, or heedless of the riches that surround him, stands on tiptoe to foresee the future. He cannot be happy and strong until he too lives with nature in the present, above time" (143).

Jazz improvisation is essentially the act of "living with nature in the present, above time," and it is a modern and uniquely American answer to Emerson's lament about the perpetually distracted state of the human mind, because it demands that both the musician(s) and the audience exist in the present moment with the intellect "released from all service." In fact, this stance is necessary for the art form to fulfill itself.

The following interview exchange between NPR radio interviewer Terry Gross and tenor saxophone legend Sonny Rollins illustrates this point:

TG: When you're improvising during a performance, are you thinking?

Rollins: No, no, I don't think. That's why I practice and I keep doing these exercises. When I'm on the stage and performing, the optimum condition is not to think. I just want the music to play itself. I don't want to have to think about it. If I have to think about what I'm doing, then the moment is already gone. (Gross 215)

Not only does Rollins speak to Emerson's definition of the most authentic manner of poetic speech—that is, when the poet “speaks somewhat wildly, not with the intellect used as an organ but with the intellect released from all service and suffered to take its direction from the celestial life”—but Rollins also emphasizes the paradoxical need to be prepared in order to improvise within a certain closed yet rich, multi-layered musical system.¹ As critic Lee Brown also states, jazz improvisers “must master a stock of musical figures and phrases out of which they gradually learn to construct solos of their own” (115). This preparation allows serious jazz improvisers to not only surprise the audience while “working within an inherited style, but [to] look for ways to change those boundaries themselves” (120).

Within this notion of “living with nature in the present, above time,” is the idea of musical time, or the beat of musical rhythm, in improvised jazz. As jazz improvisers depart from the prescribed rhythm of the composition, they follow their spontaneous musical thread, weave in and out of familiar historical patterns and make their own original musical choices. The improvisational jazz act—much like what Emerson considered the goal of his

own writing—provokes, goads, even shocks, as our tension heightens and our expectations of musical time as listeners, accustomed to music that obeys and complies to what is written on the page, are challenged. As a trailblazing nonconformist in jazz history, Brown cites the example of jazz musician and vocalist Louis Armstrong, “whose approach to rhythm took the music away from the ragtime syncopation that had earlier defined it, and thereby liberated the soloist to be a freely swinging performer” (120).²

The resulting shock of this lack of prescription inherent in the jazz improviser's performance means the very act hinges on the element of surprise, which is another key condition of Emersonian authentic living. In his essay “Experience,” Emerson isolates “surprise” in the sequence of states, or “lords of life,”

that constitute experience, “Life is a series of surprises...all good conversation, manners, and action come from spontaneity, which forgets usages and makes the moment great. Nature hates calculators; her methods are salutary and impulsive. Man lives by pulses” (318).

By “surprise,” Emerson does not mean surprise for its own sake, but rather he advocates abandoning oneself to the present moment so that the openness encourages others to act from their own “pulse.” The ability to succeed in inviting this openness and “surprising,” in this Emersonian sense, is dependent upon the cultivation of one's self reliance. Here Emerson's thought becomes especially provocative as he describes self reliance as the aversion of society, whose “virtue in most request is conformity” (321). In Emerson's championing of non-conformism, then, he places value on action over thought, echoing Rollins' statement. Emerson writes, “What I must do, is all that concerns me, not what the people think” (Emerson 136). While we can assume that Emerson implies that the doer has thought about what he must do, his point is that his moral actions ultimately define him, not his thought.

Many scholars argue that the non-conformism inherent in jazz improvisation, and the value placed on non-conformism by musicians and aficionados, has its social and historical roots in the specific American context of the repression of African Americans (Brown 117). Some of the more formalist, Eurocentric critics, such as Theodor Adorno in his essay “On Popular Music,” argue that jazz should be faulted for its “disorganized” and

“disunified” sound. Such criticism misses the point, however, for the jazz improviser's power lies partly in his willingness to flaunt the “arbitrary scalar absolutism,” or Adorno's standard. The uncharted territory that this music transports us into gives us a fresh understanding of our own minds, and perhaps even leads us to a more nuanced, sophisticated interpretation of the historical context from which jazz emerges.

We can isolate technically what actually happens when a jazz soloist plays against the composition's underlying rhythm. As the author Winthrop Sargeant describes in his book *Jazz, Hot and Hybrid*, the listener “fights the sense of unrest that this phenomenon induces, and then is relieved by the appearance of the faithful fundamental pulse which appears just where he expected, or hoped to find it” (Sargeant 241). “Jazz players actively resist formal coherence. In terms somewhat less shrill, non-conformism asks listeners to be sensitive to sources of musical significance in jazz that express African American alienation” (Brown 118).

If artistic improvisation as a moral act involves “resisting formal coherence” and “unlocking at all risks” the doors to the creative spirit, there must be something of necessary and essential worth to be gained in that act. As Brown further states, “in a situation involving risk something of value must be at stake—in this case, the formal character of the musical product. The risk-taking process itself becomes an ingredient in the result” (119). Brown argues further that any and all attempts at revising what one has just put down musically also becomes part of the music. But why is this significant? What possible moral implication does this act suggest?

In “The Poet,” Emerson writes that “art is the path of the creator to his work” (304). In other words, the *process* of art is as valuable, if not more so, than the product itself. This chronicling of the creation of art is of value in jazz improvisation because it imparts the kinetic energy of creation itself; not only powerfully inspirational, the effect can also be exemplary as a way to live. When poet John Ashbery was asked what were the primary influences in his poetry, he answered, “the abstract expressionist idea that the work is a sort of record of its own coming into existence.”³ So the dynamism and friction generated by conscious risk-taking and non-conformism born of self reliance is productive rather than solely receptive. In other words, that “new energy, of an intellect doubled on itself,” becomes real, a pulse we recognize as our own natural instinct, and therefore one we can trust. Suddenly, we perceive a call to action, yet this call does not come with instruction. Critic William Day cites the advice about improvisation by jazz pianist and composer Thelonious Monk to soprano saxophone player Steve Lacey when Lacey was interviewed by Terry Gross: “He mostly told me what not to do, he never told me what to do. But he told me what not to do when I did something that bothered him. And Monk's thing—he told me, ‘Let things go by...don't play everything. Just play certain things and let other things go by’” (108). What is interesting here is that Day suggests rightly that Monk's advice to Lacey is merely hinting at a general direction in which to go, but not to the actual destination; he calls it less a way of playing than of “committing oneself,” an “open invitation to think” (108). And when Lacey heeds Monk's words, Monk can respond to Lacey's authenticity in a way that invites a particularly vibrant dialogue to take place.

When jazz musicians improvise in a group, the dynamics shift, another quality of energy is released as a “good conversation” spontaneously begins to form. A passionate conversationalist, Emerson said this about its value:

And so in groups where debate is earnest, and especially on high Questions, the company become aware that the thought rises to an equal level in all bosoms, that all have a spiritual property in what was said, as well as the sayer. They all become wiser than they were ... All are conscious of attaining to a higher self-possession. It shines for all. (Sargeant 241-242)

Jazz improvisation introduced the spontaneous conversation into musical forms as a call and response, an effect in African music. Brown points out interestingly that horns and voices have mirrored each other in jazz

JAZZ MUSICIANS BECOME MODERN EMERSONIAN POETS WHO SPEAK SOMEWHAT WILDLY WITH THE FLOWER OF THE MIND

NON-CONFORMISM ASKS LISTENERS TO BE SENSITIVE TO SOURCES OF MUSICAL SIGNIFICANCE IN JAZZ THAT EXPRESS AFRICAN-AMERICAN ALIENATION

from the beginning, as evidenced in the vocal form of “scat” (120). Uncalculated spontaneous dialogue can unfold an emotional landscape as rich as a verbal conversation between people.⁴ When the jazz conversation becomes one in which the musicians are actually speaking over each other, as in group improvisation, a kind of simultaneous call and response develops, as described here by Sargeant:

When...players...are not quite sure what is going to happen next the music takes on the aspect of a tussle in which individual players may actually try to unhorse each other, as well as the audience by means of conflicting rhythmic impacts. When players, dancers and audience alike are hanging desperately to their sense of rhythmic orientation on one hand, are violently disturbing it or listening to it being violently disturbed on the other hand, the result is jazz in its purist form. (Sargeant 241-242)

Like the informal journals that Emerson and his contemporaries kept, and like their experimentation with writing that departed from traditional forms, jazz improvisation seeks to redefine notions of form. In her recent book, Camille Paglia cites a certain passage of Walt Whitman’s free verse poem “Song of Myself” and remarks that “such passages struck the more fastidious of Whitman’s contemporaries as sloppy or inept but may not trouble modern readers schooled on free verse and improvisatory jazz” (88). The same fastidious contemporaries of Whitman are reincarnated as twentieth-century Eurocentric formalists who do not recognize the serious degree of preparation and intention that lies behind the choice of the free verse form or the jazz improvisation as the only authentic means of giving voice to their artistic or moral convictions. Indeed, the purest jazz requires this informality and freedom from historical expectation to be what it is, yet it operates within a very specific historical context and is always cognizant of its particular laws. The quality of searching and surprising and spontaneous creation in the making is actually something composed jazz should provide, a kind of “intuitive” sound of “uncomposed jazz,” according to jazz composer and improvising pianist George Russell (Brown 120). The jazz improviser and the poet both submit to the “ethereal tides” of nature as their model.

The maverick free-jazz, alto saxophone player Ornette Coleman ends the liner notes on one of his records with the following quote, and what is striking is that if the word “music” is replaced by “nature,” his idea becomes quintessentially Emersonian, as if it had been excerpted from his essay on “Nature.” “Music doesn’t have to do anything for you or to you to become music. It exists without these restrictions, and when we reach a comparable stage with life we shall live without restriction and better the meaning of living.”⁵

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¹ This idea is reminiscent of our discussion of Ansel Adams quoting Louis Pasteur, “Chance favors the prepared mind,” regarding capturing the photographic image “Moonrise, Hernandez” in 1941.

² Brown also mentions Charlie Parker, Ornette Coleman and John Coltrane as other jazz “revolutionaries” (120).

³ *The Paris Review*. “The Art of Poetry” No. 33. Interviewed by Peter A. Stitt. Issue 90, Winter 1983.

⁴ A good example of this conversation can be heard in the composition “John S.” by Sonny Rollins, in which he plays the tenor saxophone and Jim Hall plays the electric guitar. Their call and response has all of the emotional wit of jockeying verbal banter.

⁵ “Forms and Sounds,” LP liner notes by Ornette Coleman, 1968.



SENECA'S OEDIPUS:

A ROMAN APPROACH

by Ron Lewis

In two contrasting versions of the play *Oedipus*, one by the Roman Seneca, (3 BCE-65 CE), and another written about 500 years earlier by the Greek Sophocles (497-406 BCE) there are notable contrasts. In the opening monologue of Seneca’s play, the king describes a devastating plague destroying Thebes. He suspects that he is responsible for this devastation, but he would rather “spurn the kingdom infected by [my]

deadly hand” (Fitch 23) than help those dying in Thebes. This cowardly response to the adversity of others is compounded when Oedipus complains that his fate is too cruel and he blames it, not on his ineffectual choices in life, but on the “cruel...[and] too harsh” gods. He wishes that he could escape his carcer either by flight or by suicide. But he can’t—the gods, he suspects, have something else in store for him.



Conversely, Sophocles's Oedipus has gravitas; he weeps for his city and his nation, and is "ready to help" (Fagles) those who are suffering from the plague. He tells the Chorus that he grieves "for these, my people far more than I fear for my own life" (163). Unlike Seneca's king, Sophocles's Oedipus longs to understand the mystery of the contagion's source. In his quest to find answers to that mystery, Sophocles's Oedipus becomes a sympathetic character; he is the "man of grief" (244), "the great example" (233) of the suffering that befalls all humankind.

As we can see, this brief summary of both plays shows "a quite extraordinary degree" (Henry 128) of difference between them. Critics have perceived the Sophoclean king as "benign, self-confident, determined" (Fitch 5), as well as "sympathetic," and "appealing" (Mendell 10); conversely, Seneca's Oedipus is described as "obsessed with anxiety and guilt" (Fitch 5), or as "random," "isolated," and "unstable" (Henry 130). There seems little doubt that Seneca's characterization of Oedipus is due, in part, to the function of Roman drama, summed up here by A. J. Boyle: "What Roman audiences most wanted of the theatre, amphitheatre, or triumphal processions was visual spectacle" (Boyle 142). One reason for this emphasis on showiness is that roughly 500 years separate the plays, which are the products of highly different cultures.

Where Greek culture incorporated drama into religious worship, Roman theatre was principally for diversionary entertainment. Though it often played a part in religious festivals, it was not the civic duty that Greek drama was. Roman theater was quite often full of acrobatics, mime, dance, sea battles, etc. Seneca's version of the Oedipus story employs the verbal equivalents of this sort of theatrical indulgence because it uses an abundance of rhetorical devices to create a tone of horror and doom—that "spectacle" Boyle wrote about. The use of these excesses is the reason so many critics have disparaged Seneca's plays. As one scholar has said, Seneca's *Oedipus* is "a stale bag of stately [rhetorical] tricks...[a play of] decoration rather than substance" (Mendell 63). Yet, despite his rhetorical flourishes—or perhaps because of them—Seneca is able to invert the story we are so familiar with in Sophocles's standard bearer and make the story into something new. Seneca does this by using hyperbole and melodrama to starkly reveal the king's primary emotions of fear and anxiety. As a result, Seneca's *Oedipus* becomes *Grand Guignol* entertainment of a very high order. As we shall see later, Seneca

may also have wanted his audience, aware firsthand of the fickleness of Claudius, Caligula and Nero, to recognize in his *Oedipus* the dangers inherent in weak and malicious kings.

Seneca's opening monologue allows us to see the depth of the king's anxiety. Oedipus tells us of his anticipation of the collapse of his fatherland and he suspects that he is to blame. He is riddled with fear—and with good reason. His Thebes is a tableau straight out of the fifth circle of Dante's Hell. "Piles of bodies" (Fitch 21) litter the streets; a miasma—with the taint of cremated bodies and the suggestion of the "greedy plague" (19)—drifts over everything; succor and shame have fled; dazed citizens muddle about in grief. Oedipus seems to know that he is the cause of this plague when he says, "I have made the heavens baneful." He intuits that the plague has something to do with the Delphic prophecy: that his destiny is to kill his father and to sleep with his mother. Though he tried to "[safeguard] the laws of Nature" (21) by fleeing his "parents" in Corinth, Oedipus has since unwittingly killed his father, and slept with his mother. When he says that he "must fear even what [I] think impossible," he suggests that he is culpable of the monstrous crimes fated by the prophecy. Focused solely on himself, rather than on the suffering of his people, Oedipus demands "an early fate" or an end to his suffering, deploring the cruelty of the gods. He mulls over escaping Thebes, even considering a return to Polybus and Merope in Corinth, whom he must know are not his real parents after all.

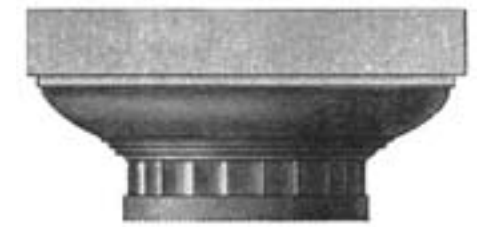
At the end of Act I, the Chorus links what has just occurred to greater themes. They take Oedipus to task, suggesting that he is their destroyer. They identify the king as the "offspring of [the] Cadmus," (Fitch 27) family line, one whose history contains much murder and mayhem. Bacchus, Oedipus's not-so-distant cousin, is particularly important in the Chorus's speech because he stands in stark contrast to Oedipus himself. Where Bacchus brings life, celebration, joy, and fecundity, Oedipus is revealed to be the source of the plague destroying his people. The Chorus in Act I depicts this double scourge—the living hell of the "infection" by Oedipus on the one hand, and the lack of fertility caused by the absence of Bacchus on the other. The "seven gates" of Thebes, says the Chorus, are clogged with the "heavy carnage" of the plague. "Trepid" (33) limbs burn with a fever that "distends the eyes with copious blood," "dark blood drips...out of...gaping veins" and "strident groans" are heard in Thebes. Even the prayers of the infected, heard

"among the altars," are corrupted, and ask only for speedy deaths. These gory descriptions make the Chorus's point clear, that Oedipus caused this suffering by committing patricide and incest. Seneca, being a leading proponent of Stoicism, the unofficial philosophy of the Roman republic, must have viewed these "sins" as contraventions of the stoical virtues of justice, temperance, courage and wisdom.

By the end of Act II, Oedipus has passionately embraced his suffering and shows little inclination to change; we see none of Sophocles's Oedipus's reasoned response to circumstances. Seneca's king has become painfully aware of his own mental state, his "sick" (Fitch 39) mind constantly "turns over [its] cares and revisits its fears" (83). Specifically, Oedipus worries about what Creon, seeking knowledge of Laius's killer, has learned in his audience with the Delphic oracle. Awaiting that news, Oedipus "trembles with fear, apprehensive of fate's direction" (35). The king refuses to "see" the truth inside himself and it is his heightened emotional state that brings about this blindness. He represses what he knows to be the truth, that it was he who killed his father. Tiresias sees this repression a little later in the play, saying "Terrible evils are here [in Thebes], but deeply hidden" (47).

Seneca plays with the idea of hidden or obscured truth throughout the play. In fact it opens with a brief description of a dark haze shrouding Thebes, which becomes a symbolic situation, indicative of Oedipus's willful refusal to act. When Tiresias is summoned to the court to help solve the mystery of Laius's murderer, we learn that Tiresias's ability to prophesy is gone. He, like Oedipus, can no longer see. This is no doubt due to that "murk" caused by Oedipus's sins. Tiresias must instead use the magic of divination to help Oedipus solve the mystery of Laius's killer.

Coming just after this episode, the Chorus sings an ode to Bacchus that reveals fond memories of a time when the "chattering streams cut through the grass; [and] the earth drank deep of the sweet fluids" (101). This ode is a paean to better times and so becomes a counterpoint to the divination scene where death and abomination—in grossly disturbing detail—are revealed to be the new natural order. It suggests that when Bacchus was allowed a place in the world, the world was in balance. A little later, in Act III, Creon reinforces this theme after he has returned from the underworld to tell Oedipus that Oedipus himself is the murderer of Laius. The solution to Thebes' problems, is to "expel the king [and the ground] ...will bloom in a springtime flowering and regain its verdure; the



THE SOPHOCLEAN KING IS PERCEIVED AS BENIGN, SELF-CONFIDENT, DETERMINED, WHILE SENECA'S OEDIPUS WAS OBSESSED WITH ANXIETY AND GUILT



life-giving air will be pure to breathe, and beauty will appear in the woodlands" (93).

When Creon reveals the truth of the king's crimes, it is clear that Oedipus does not have "emotional intelligence." One part of him intuitively understands that he is guilty and why; another part of him wants to use reason and logic to seek the truth. Yet Oedipus doesn't use his emotions to help him understand his thinking. He is, in Seneca's rendering, always suffering mental strain. Now condemned to a life of uncertainty, Oedipus calls himself an "inversion," "the iniquity of the age," a "violation," and "an abomination of the gods" (97). This reaction begs the questions: What should Oedipus do now that he knows the truth? Banish himself from Thebes and so free his countrymen from the plague? Kill himself?

The Chorus's fourth ode implies, in a sailing metaphor, that Oedipus should stoically trim his sails and run "a middle course" (99) because there seems to be a danger that the king might kill himself. Be reasonable, the Chorus suggests. But Oedipus is an irresolute, unmanly king unable to face adversity. His wife/mother, Jocasta, states in Act I, that Oedipus should calm down and not "make troubles heavier by bemoaning them" (25). Oedipus doesn't learn from her when he insists he is no coward, nor does he in the end when we see his reaction to the news of his parentage: "...wild [with] fury...his eyes savage [with] groans and deep mutterings, cold sweat [running] over his limbs, [spilling] threats from his foaming mouth, [Oedipus's] great pain poured from within him" (111).

Oedipus feels suicide is one possible response to his sinfulness, but decides that suicide is too swift. He chooses instead, with "audacious violence" and "ferocious anger," (103) to "root out" his eyeballs. Befitting the gory earlier scenes, Oedipus lets his eyes dangle by their roots, creating "a flurry of drops wet his face." This image suggests Oedipus weeps blood. Certainly no one is there to weep for him, or with him; after all, who could love a man like him, a man whose sole concern is himself? Not once in the play does Oedipus show any affection for either his children or his wife, and whenever Jocasta speaks to him she scolds him and he responds with defiance or complaints. He is an unloved and unlovable man who shows no remorse for what he has done, only a pathetic sorrow for himself.

Seneca's play closes with little of the moral intensity that Sophocles brings to his story. Certainly *we* don't weep with Oedipus; we are too disgusted to find anything cathartic in his story. In Sophocles's version, Oedipus's blinding seems justified and the paradox

his sightlessness presents is wonderfully ironic. Blind to his fate, Oedipus *sees* only when he finds the truth; once he sees that truth, he understands how blind he truly was and how awful that blindness was. In his blinding there is a rebirth; his darkness is filled with the light of understanding.

True to the darkness of Seneca's version, Seneca's Oedipus, who has suspected the truth all along, does not know what to do with the truth once he has it. He says in the end "at last I have found a night suited to my marriage chamber" (105). He has torn out his eyes because the "threat of the light," or self-understanding, is "so great" that, rather than learn from experience, he wants merely to "cherish [his] darkness" and "escape the witness of the daylight" (107). Oedipus then "flees" (111) into his "blind night" taking "Disease, Wasting...black Plague and ravening Pain" with him. Literally and figuratively Oedipus escapes from Thebes a blind man.

Where Sophocles's king is redeemed by his self-determination and its consequent self-awareness, Seneca's king is fatalistic. Since this is a play about a king and not an Everyman, its implication seems to be what Jocasta states explicitly in Act I, that "the safety of kings" (39) should not be pitted against "the people's well-being..." (93). Because Jocasta is often the stoical voice of the play, and since Seneca himself was the leading stoic philosopher of his day, perhaps he is saying that a king who cannot use his reason to protect, guide, and comfort his people in a time of need has neither the psychological nor the moral stability required of a leader.

Seneca, himself, was ordered to commit suicide by just such a leader, Nero, for Seneca's alleged involvement in an assassination attempt to kill the Emperor. It doesn't seem too much of a stretch to link Seneca's Oedipus with Nero. If Seneca's Oedipus is merely a manqué stand-in for the manqué Roman emperors of his day, Seneca's play seems to be saying that a country suffering a national crisis, be it the fires of Nero's Rome or a plague in Thebes, would fare much better with a Sophocles-style leader.

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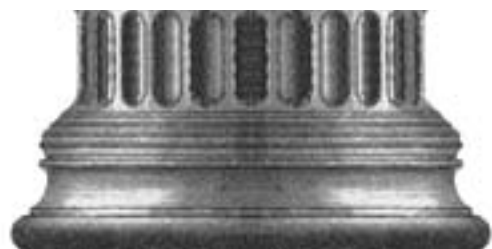
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SENECA'S PLAY CLOSES WITH LITTLE OF THE MORAL INTENSITY THAT SOPHOCLES BRINGS TO HIS STORY



JONAH VISITS A CATHEDRAL

by Tamara Tinker



Deliver me, Oh Lord, from the sin of looking out.
Place me in the cathedral of myself and teach me
to study its vaults. May leaded glass in Gothic arches
be all the vista I care to see. Carpet the stones
with a lattice of sunlight. The small door
at the end of the gallery leading to the moat
will be forever beyond my realm and scope.

It was not what you think, pilgrim.
I nearly suffocated, strapped by ribs
to a writhing spine. The fish was miserable too.
Filled to the lips, he worshiped the net.
Fishermen ran from a fish-made-man.

Preserve me, God, in the womb of repentance
as you preserved the children of Nineveh.
These golden sinews cannot be false to you.
Their modest glow is merely reflected;
they offer only themselves up.

You took with a wind the gourd of my anger.
Remove me now from the sanctuary of remorse.
I taught you forgiveness. Leave me by the road—
without chattel or charm, neither servant nor saint—
one homeless survivor of the ship of state.

ALL THE ROSES

by Tamara Tinker

All the roses wilted at once;
all their crimson lips
kiss the table, or try to.

They can't escape
their stems, the way
some people can't

let go of the past.
The milky water in the
crystal vase is not

fit to drink. The roses
killed it, or it them.
Enough, death is a victim

too. Ask any murderer.
He'll show you matter of factly
just how he was dismembered

by a ruthless, responsible
adult. Old age is the
afterlife for unbelievers.

It sets things right. Every surfeit
is repaid in dearth, every
vanity with shame.

All the roses withered together,
as if they willed it, as if
exhaustion were all that mattered.

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